

*IN THE
DAYS OF MY YOUTH.*



*BY THE AUTHOR OF
BARBARA'S HISTORY.*



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VOL. III.

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BY

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“BARBARA’S HISTORY,”

&c. &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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IN THE DAYS OF MY YOUTH.

CHAPTER I.

Weary and Far Distant.

TWICE already, in accordance with my promise to Dalrymple, I had called upon Madame de Courcelles, and finding her out each time, had left my card, and gone away disappointed. From Dalrymple himself, although I had written to him several times, I heard seldom, and always briefly. His first notes were dated from Berlin, and those succeeding them from Vienna. He seemed restless, bitter, dissatisfied with himself, and with the world. Naturally unfit for a lounging, idle life, his active nature, now that it had to bear up

against the irritation of hope deferred, chafed and fretted for work.

“My sword-arm,” he wrote in one of his letters, “is weary of its holiday. There are times when I long for the smell of gun-powder, and the thunder of battle. I am sick to death of churches and picture-galleries, operas, diletantism, white-kid-glovism, and all the hollow shows and seemings of society. Sometimes I regret having left the army—at others I rejoice; for, after all, in these piping times of peace, to be a soldier is to be a mere painted puppet—a thing of pipe-clay and gold bullion—an expensive scare-crow—an elegant Guy Fawkes—a sign, not of what is, but of what has been, and yet may be again. For my part, I care not to take the livery without the service. Pshaw! will things never mend? Are the good old times, and the good old international hatreds, gone by for ever? Shall we never again have a thorough, seasonable, wholesome, continental war? This place (Vienna) would be worth fighting for, if one had the chance. I sometimes amuse myself

by planning a siege, when I ride round the fortifications, as is my custom of an afternoon."

In another, after telling me that he had been reading some books of travel in Egypt and Central America, he said:—

"Next to a military life I think that of a traveller—a genuine traveller, who turns his back upon railroads and guides—must be the most exciting and the most enviable under heaven. Since reading these books, I dream of the jungle and the desert, and fancy that a buffalo-hunt must be almost as fine sport as a charge of cavalry. Oh, what a weary exile this is! I feel as if the very air were stagnant around me, and I, like the accursed vessel that carried the ancient mariner,—

‘As idle as a painted ship,
Upon a painted ocean.’"

Sometimes, though rarely, he mentioned Madame de Courcelles, and then very guardedly: always as "Madame de Courcelles," and never as his wife.

"That morning," he wrote, "comes back

to me with all the vagueness of a dream—you will know what morning I mean, and why it fills so shadowy a page in the book of my memory. And it might as well have been a dream, for aught of present peace or future hope that it has brought me. I often think that I was selfish when I exacted that pledge from her. I do not see of what good it can be to either her or me, or in what sense I can be said to have gained even the power to protect and serve her. Would that I were rich; or that she and I were poor together, and dwelling far away in some American wild, under the shade of primeval trees, “the world forgetting; by the world forgot!” I should enjoy the life of a Canadian settler—so free, so rational, so manly. How happy we might be—she with her children, her garden, her books; I with my dogs, my gun, my lands! What a curse it is, this spider’s web of civilisation, that hems and cramps us in on every side, and from which not all the armour of common-sense is sufficient to preserve us!”

Sometimes he broke into a strain of forced

gaiety, more sad, to my thinking, than the bitterest lamentations could have been.

“I wish to heaven,” he said, in one of his later letters—“I wish to heaven I had no heart, and no brain! I wish I was, like some worthy people I know, a mere human zoophyte, consisting of nothing but a mouth and a stomach. Only conceive how it must simplify life when once one has succeeded in making a clean sweep of all those finer emotions which harass more complicated organisms! Envidable zoophytes, that live only to digest!—who would not be of the brotherhood?”

In another he wrote :—

“I seem to have lived years in the last five or six weeks, and to have grown suddenly old and cynical. Some French writer (I think it is Alphonse Karr) says, ‘Nothing in life is really great and good, except what is not true. Man’s greatest treasures are his illusions.’ Alas! my illusions have been dropping from me in showers of late, like withered leaves in Autumn. The tree will be bare as a gallows ere long, if these rough

winds keep on blowing. If only things would amuse me as of old ! If there was still excitement in play, and forgetfulness in wine, and novelty in travel ! But there is none—and all things alike are ‘flat, stale, and unprofitable.’ The truth is, Damon, I want but one thing—and wanting that, lack all.”


Here is one more extract, and it shall be the last :—

“You ask me how I pass my days—in truth, wearily enough. I rise with the dawn, but that is not very early in September ; and I ride for a couple of hours before breakfast. After breakfast I play billiards in some public room, consume endless pipes, read the papers, and so on. Later in the day I scowl through a picture-gallery, or a string of studios ; or take a pull up the river ; or start off upon a long, solitary objectless walk through miles and miles of forest. Then comes dinner—the inevitable, insufferable, interminable German table-d’hôte dinner—and then there is the evening to be got through somehow ! Now and then I drop in at a

theatre, but generally take refuge in some plebeian Lust Garten or Beer Hall, where, amid clouds of tobacco-smoke, one may listen to the best part-singing and Zitter-playing in Europe. And so my days drag by—who but myself knows how slowly? Truly, Damon, there comes to every one of us, sooner or later, a time when we say of life as Christopher Sly said of the comedy—
“’Tis an excellent piece of work. Would ’twere done !”

CHAPTER II.

The Vicomte de Caylus.

T was after receiving the last of these letters that I hazarded a third visit to Madame de Courcelles. This time, I ventured to present myself at her door about midday, and was at once ushered upstairs into a drawing-room looking out on the Rue Castellane.

Seeing her open work-table, with the empty chair and footstool beside it, I thought at the first glance that I was alone in the room, when a muttered "Sacr-r-r-re ! Down, Bijou !" made me aware of a gentleman extended at full length upon a sofa near the fireplace, and of a vicious-looking Spitz crouched beneath it.

The gentleman lifted his head from the sofa-cushion ; stared at me ; bowed carelessly ; got upon his feet ; and, seizing the poker, lunged savagely at the fire, as if he had a spite against it, and would have put it out, if he could. This done, he yawned aloud, flung himself into the nearest easy-chair, and rang the bell.

“ More coals, Henri,” he said, imperiously ; “ and—stop ! a bottle of Seltzer-water.”

The servant hesitated.

“ I don’t think, Monsieur le Vicomte,” he said “ that Madame has any Seltzer-water in the house ; but ” . . .

“ Confound you !—you never have anything in the house at the moment one wants it,” interrupted the gentleman, irritably.

“ I can send for some, if Monsieur le Vicomte desires it.”

“ Send for it, then ; and remember, when I next ask for it, let there be some at hand.”

“ Yes, Monsieur le Vicomte.”

“ And—Henri !”

“ Yes, Monsieur le Vicomte.”

“Bid them be quick. I hate to be kept waiting!”

The servant murmured his usual “Yes, Monsieur le Vicomte,” and disappeared; but with a look of such subdued dislike and impatience in his face, as would scarcely have flattered Monsieur le Vicomte had he chanced to surprise it.

In the meantime the dog had never ceased growling; whilst I, in default of something better to do, turned over the leaves of an album, and took advantage of a neighbouring mirror to scrutinise the outward appearance of this authoritative occupant of Madame de Courcelles’ drawing-room.

He was a small, pallid, slender man of about thirty-five or seven years of age; with delicate, effeminate features, and hair thickly sprinkled with grey. His fingers, white and taper as a woman’s, were covered with rings. His dress was careless, but that of a gentleman. Glancing at him even thus furtively, I could not help observing the worn lines about his temples, the mingled languor and irritability of his every gesture;

the restless suspicion of his eye; the hard curves about his handsome mouth.

“*Mille tonnerres !*” said he, between his teeth, “come out, Bijou—come out, I say !”

The dog came out unwillingly, and changed the growl to a little whine of apprehension. His master immediately dealt him a smart kick that sent him crouching to the farther corner of the room, where he hid himself under a chair.

“I’ll teach you to make that noise,” muttered he, as he drew his chair closer to the fire, and bent over it, shiveringly. “A yelping brute, that would be all the better for hanging.”

Having sat thus for a few moments, he seemed to grow restless again, and, pushing back his chair, rose, looked out of the window, took a turn or two across the room, and paused at length to take a book from one of the side-tables. As he did this, our eyes met in the looking-glass; whereupon he turned hastily back to the window and stood there whistling, till it occurred to him to ring the bell again.

“Monsieur rang?” said the footman, once more making his appearance at the door.

“*Mort de ma vie!* yes. The Seltzer water.”

“I have sent for it, Monsieur le Vicomte.”

“And it is not yet come?”

“Not yet, Monsieur le Vicomte.”

He muttered something to himself, and dropped back into the chair before the fire.

“Does Madame de Courcelles know that I am here?” he asked, as the servant, after lingering a moment, was about to leave the room.

“I delivered Monsieur le Vicomte’s message, and brought back Madame’s reply,” said the man, “half an hour ago.”

“True—I had forgotten it. You may go.”

The footman closed the door noiselessly, and had no sooner done so than he was recalled by another impatient peal.

“Here, Henri—have you told Madame de Courcelles that this gentleman is also waiting to see her?”

“Yes, Monsieur le Vicomte.”

“*Eh bien ?*”

“And Madame said she should be down in a few moments.”

“*Sacrédiè !* go back, then, and inquire if”

“Madame is here.”

As the footman moved back respectfully, Madame de Courcelles came into the room. She was looking perhaps somewhat paler, but, to my thinking, more charming than ever. Her dark hair was gathered closely round her head in massive braids, displaying to their utmost advantage all the delicate curves of her throat and chin; while her rich morning dress, made of some dark material, and fastened at the throat by a round brooch of dead gold, fell in loose and ample folds, like the drapery of a Roman matron. Coming at once to meet me, she extended a cordial hand, and said :—

“I had begun to despair of ever seeing you again. Why have you always come when I was out?”

“Madame,” I said, bending low over the

slender fingers, that seemed to linger kindly in my own, "I have been undeservedly unfortunate."

"Remember for the future," she said, "that I am always at home till midday, and after five."

Then, turning to her other visitor, she said :—

"*Mon cousin*, allow me to present my friend. Monsieur Arbuthnot—Monsieur le Vicomte Adrien de Caylus."

I had suspected as much already. Who but he would have dared to assume these airs of insolence? Who but her suitor and my friend's rival? I had disliked him at first sight, and now I detested him. Whether it was that my aversion showed itself in my face, or that Madame de Courcelles' cordial welcome of myself annoyed him, I know not; but his bow was even cooler than my own.

"I have been waiting to see you, *Helène*," said he, looking at his watch, "for nearly three-quarters of an hour."

"I sent you word, *mon cousin*, that I was finishing a letter for the foreign post," said

Madame de Courcelles, coldly, "and that I could not come sooner."

Monsieur de Caylus bit his lip and cast an impatient glance in my direction.

"Can you spare me a few moments alone, Helène?" he said.

"Alone, *mon cousin*?"

"Yes, upon a matter of business."

Madame de Courcelles sighed.

"If Monsieur Arbuthnot will be so indulgent as to excuse me for five minutes," she replied. "This way, *mon cousin*."

So saying, she lifted a dark green curtain, beneath which they passed to a farther room out of sight and hearing.

They remained a long time away. So long, that I grew weary of waiting, and, having turned over all the illustrated books upon the table, and examined every painting on the walls, turned to the window, as the idler's last resource, and watched the passers-by.

What endless entertainment in the lifetime of a Paris street, even though but a branch from one of the greater arteries!

What colour—what character—what animation—what variety! Every third or fourth man is a blue-bloused artisan; every tenth, a soldier in a showy uniform. Then comes the grisette in her white cap; and the lemonade-vendor with his fantastic pagoda, slung like a peep-show across his shoulders; and the peasant woman from Normandy, with her high-crowned head-dress; and the abbé all in black, with his shovel-hat pulled low over his eyes; and the mountebank selling pencils and lucifer-matches to the music of a hurdy-gurdy; and the gendarme, who is the terror of street urchins; and the gamin, who is the torment of the gendarme; and the water-carrier, with his cart and his cracked bugle; and the elegant ladies and gentleman, who look in at shop windows and hire seats at two sous each in the Champs Elysées; and, of course, the English tourist reading “Galigani’s Guide” as he goes along. Then, perhaps, a regiment marches past with colours flying and trumpets braying; or a fantastic-looking funeral goes by, with a

hearse like a four-post bed hung with black velvet and silver ; or the peripatetic showman with his company of white rats establishes himself on the pavement opposite, till admonished to move on by the sargent de ville. What an ever-shifting panorama ! What a kaleidoscope of colour and character ! What a study for the humourist, the painter, the poet !

Thinking thus, and watching the ever-flowing current as it hurried on below, I became aware of a smart cab drawn by a showy chestnut, which dashed round the corner of the street and came down the Rue Castellane at a pace that caused every head to turn as it went by. Almost before I had time to do more than observe that it was driven by a moustachioed and lavender-kidded gentleman, it drew up before the house, and a trim tiger jumped down, and thundered at the door. At that moment the gentleman, taking advantage of the pause to light a cigar, looked up, and I recognized the black moustache and sinister countenance of Monsieur de Simoncourt.

“A gentleman for Monsieur le Vicomte,” said the servant, drawing back the green curtain and opening a vista into the room beyond.

“Ask him to come upstairs,” said the voice of De Caylus from within.

“I have done so, Monsieur; but he prefers to wait in the cabriolet.”

“Pshaw!—confound it!—say that I’m coming.”

The servant withdrew.

I then heard the words “perfectly safe investment—present convenience—unexpected demand,” rapidly uttered by Monsieur de Caylus; and then they both came back; he looking flushed and angry—she calm as ever.

“Then I shall call on you again tomorrow, Helène,” said he, plucking nervously at his glove. “You will have had time to reflect. You will see matters differently.”

Madame de Courcelles shook her head.

“Reflection will not change my opinion,” she said gently.

“Well, shall I send Lejeune to you? He acts as solicitor to the company, and” . . .

“*Mon cousin*,” interposed the lady, “I have already given you my decision—why pursue the question further? I do not wish to see Monsieur Lejeune, and I have no speculative tastes whatever.”

Monsieur de Caylus, with a suppressed exclamation that sounded like a curse, rent his glove right in two, and then, as if annoyed at the self-betrayal, crushed up the fragments in his hand, and laughed uneasily.

“All women are alike,” he said, with an impatient shrug. “They know nothing of the world, and place no faith in those who are competent to advise them. I had given you credit, my charming cousin, for broader views.”

Madame de Courcelles smiled without replying, and caressed the little dog, which had come out from under the sofa to fondle round her.

“Poor Bijou!” said she. “Pretty Bijou! Do you take good care of him, *mon cousin*?”

“Upon my soul, not I,” returned De Caylus, carelessly. “Lecroix feeds him, I believe, and superintends his general education.”

“Who is Lecroix?”

“My valet, courier, body-guard, letter-carrier, and general *factotum*. A useful vagabond, without whom I should scarcely know my right hand from my left!”

“Poor Bijou! I fear, then, your chance of being remembered is small indeed!” said Madame de Courcelles, compassionately.

But Monsieur le Vicomte only whistled to the dog; bowed haughtily to me; kissed, with an air of easy familiarity, before which she evidently recoiled, first the hand and then the cheek of his beautiful cousin, and so left the room. The next moment I saw him spring into the cabriolet, take his place beside Monsieur de Simoncourt, and drive away, with Bijou following at a pace that might almost have tried a greyhound.

“My cousin, De Caylus, has lately returned from Algiers on leave of absence,” said Madame de Courcelles, after a few mo-

ments of awkward silence, during which I had not known what to say. "You have heard of him, perhaps?"

"Yes, Madame, I have heard of Monsieur de Caylus."

"From Captain Dalrymple?"

"From Captain Dalrymple, Madame; and in society."

"He is a brave officer," she said, hesitatingly, "and has greatly distinguished himself in this last campaign."

"So I have heard, Madame."

She looked at me, as if she would fain read how much or how little Dalrymple had told me.

"You are Captain Dalrymple's friend, Mr. Arbuthnot," she said, presently, "and I know you have his confidence. You are probably aware that my present position with regard to Monsieur de Caylus is not only very painful, but also very difficult."

"Madame, I know it."

"But it is a position of which I have the command, and which no one understands so well as myself. To attempt to help me,

would be to add to my embarrassments. For this reason it is well that Captain Dalrymple is not here. His presence just now in Paris could do no good—on the contrary, would be certain to do harm. Do you follow my meaning, Monsieur Arbuthnot?”

“I understand what you say, Madame; but”

“But you do not quite understand why I say it? *Eh bien*, Monsieur, when you write to Captain Dalrymple . . . for you write sometimes, do you not?”

“Often, Madame.”

“Then, when you write, say nothing that may add to his anxieties. If you have reason at any time to suppose that I am importuned to do this or that; that I am annoyed; that I have my own battle to fight—still, for his sake as well as for mine, be silent. It is my own battle, and I know how to fight it.”

“Alas! Madame”

She smiled sadly.

“Nay,” she said, “I have more courage

than you would suppose ; more courage and more will. I am fully capable of bearing my own burdens ; and Captain Dalrymple has already enough of his own. Now tell me something of yourself. You are here, I think, to study medicine. Are you greatly devoted to your work ? Have you many friends ?”

“ I study, Madame—not always very regularly ; and I have one friend.”

“ An Englishman ?”

“ No, Madame—a German.”

“ A fellow-student, I presume.”

“ No, Madame—an artist.”

“ And you are very happy here ?”

“ I have occupations and amusements ; therefore, if to be neither idle nor dull is to be happy, I suppose I am happy.”

“ Nay,” she said quickly, “ be sure of it. Do not doubt it. Who asks more from Fate courts his own destruction.”

“ But it would be difficult, Madame, to go through life without desiring something better, something higher—without ambition, for instance—without love.”

“ Ambition and love !” she repeated,

smiling sadly. "There speaks the man. Ambition first—the aim and end of life; love next—the pleasant adjunct to success! Ah, beware of both."

"But without either, life would be a desert."

"Life is a desert," she replied, bitterly. "Ambition is its mirage, ever beckoning, ever receding—love its Dead Sea fruit, fair without and dust within. You look surprised. You did not expect such gloomy theories from me—yet I am no cynic. I have lived; I have suffered; I am a woman—*viola tout*. When you are a few years older, and have trodden some of the flinty ways of life, you will see the world as I see it."

"It may be so, Madame; but if life is indeed a desert, it is, at all events, some satisfaction to know that the dwellers in tents become enamoured of their lot, and, content with what the desert has to give, desire no other. It is only the neophyte who rides after the mirage and thirsts for the Dead Sea Apple."

She smiled again.

“Ah!” she said, “the gifts of the desert are twofold, and what one gets depends on what one seeks. For some the wilderness has gifts of resignation, meditation, peace; for others it has the horse, the tent, the pipe, the gun, the chase of the panther and antelope. But to go back to yourself. Life, you say, would be barren without ambition and love. What is your ambition?”

“Nay, Madame, that is more than I can tell you—more than I know myself.”

“Your profession . . .”

“If ever I dream dreams, Madame,” I interrupted quickly, “my profession has no share in them. It is a profession I do not love, and which I hope some day to abandon.”

“Your dreams, then?”

I shook my head.

“Vague — unsubstantial — illusory — forgotten as soon as dreamt! How can I analyse them? How can I describe them? In childhood one says—‘I should like to be a soldier, and conquer the world;’ or ‘I

should like to be a sailor, and discover new Continents ;' or ' I should like to be a poet, and wear a laurel wreath, like Petrarch and Dante ;' but as one gets older and wiser (conscious, perhaps, of certain latent energies, and weary of certain present difficulties and restraints), one can only wait, as best one may, and watch for the rising of that tide whose flood leads on to fortune."

With this I rose to take my leave. Madame de Courcelles smiled and put out her hand.

"Come often," she said; "and come at the hours when I am at home. I shall always be glad to see you. Above all, remember my caution—not a word to Captain Dalrymple, either now or at any other time."

"Madame, you may rely upon me. One thing I ask, however, as the reward of my discretion."

"And that one thing?"

"Permission, Madame, to serve you in any capacity, however humble—in any strait where a brother might interfere, or a faith-

ful retainer lay down his life in your service."

With a sweet earnestness that made my heart beat and my cheeks glow, she thanked and promised me.

"I shall look upon you henceforth," she said, "as my knight *sans peur et sans reproche*."

Heaven knows that not all the lessons of all the moralists that ever wrote or preached since the world began, could just then have done me half such good service as did those simple words. They came at the moment when I most needed them—when I had almost lost my taste for society, and was sliding day by day into habits of more confirmed idleness and Bohemianism. They roused me. They made a man of me. They recalled me to higher aims, "purer manners, nobler laws." They clothed me, so to speak, in the *toga virilis* of a generous devotion. They made me long to prove myself "*sans peur*;" to merit the "*sans reproche*." They marked an era in my life never to be forgotten or effaced.

Let it not be thought for one moment that I loved her—or fancied I loved her. No, not so far as one heart-beat would carry me ; but I was proud to possess her confidence and her friendship. Was she not Dalrymple's wife, and had he not asked me to watch over and protect her? Nay, had she not called me her knight and accepted my fealty?

Nothing, perhaps, is so invaluable to a young man on entering life as the friendship of a pure-minded and highly-cultivated woman who, removed too far above him to be regarded with passion, is yet beautiful enough to engage his admiration ; whose good opinion becomes the measure of his own self-respect ; and whose confidence is a sacred trust only to be parted from with loss of life or honour.

Such an influence upon myself at this time was the friendship of Madame de Courcelles. I went out from her presence that morning morally stronger than before, and at each repetition of my visit I found her influence strengthen and increase.

Sometimes I met Monsieur de Caylus, on which occasions my stay was ever of the briefest ; but I most frequently found her alone, and then our talk was of books, of art, of culture, of all those high and stirring things that alike move the sympathies of the educated woman and rouse the enthusiasm of the young man. She became interested in me ; at first for Dalrymple's sake, and by-and-by, however little I deserved it, for my own—and she showed that interest in many ways inexpressibly valuable to me then and thenceforth. She took pains to educate my taste ; opened to me hitherto unknown avenues of study ; led me to explore “ fresh fields and pastures new,” to which, but for her help, I might not have found my way for many a year to come. My reading, till now, had been almost wholly English or classical ; she sent me to the old French literature—to the *Chansons de Geste* ; to the metrical romances of the Trouvères ; to the Chronicles of Froissart, Monstrelet, and Philip de Comines, and to the poets and dramatists that immediately succeeded them.

These books opened a new world to me ; and, having daily access to two fine public libraries, I plunged at once into a course of new and delightful reading, ranging over all that fertile tract of song and history that begins far away in the morning land of mediæval romance, and leads on, century after century, to the new era that began with the Revolution.

With what avidity I devoured those picturesque old chronicles—those autobiographies—those poems, and satires, and plays that I now read for the first time ! What evenings I spent with St. Simon, and De Thou, and Charlotte de Bavière ! How I relished Voltaire ! How I laughed over Molière ! How I revelled in Montaigne ! Most of all, however, I loved the quaint lore of the earlier literature :—

“ Old legends of the monkish page,
Traditions of the saint and sage,
Tales that have the rime of age,
And Chronicles of Eld.”

Nor was this all. I had hitherto loved art as a child or a savage might love it, ig-

norantly, half-blindly, without any knowledge of its principles, its purposes, or its history. But Madame de Courcelles put into my hands certain books that opened my eyes to a thousand wonders unseen before. The works of Vasari, Nibby, Winkelman and Lessing, the æsthetic writings of Goëthe and the Schlegels, awakened in me, one after the other, fresher and deeper revelations of beauty.

I wandered through the galleries of the Louvre like one newly gifted with sight. I haunted the Venus of Milo and the Diane Chasseresse like another Pygmalion. The more I admired, the more I found to admire. The more I comprehended, the more I found there remained for me to comprehend. I recognised in art the Sphinx whose enigma is never solved. I learnt, for the first time, that poetry may be committed to imperishable marble, and steeped in unfading colours. By degrees, as I followed in the footsteps of great thinkers, my insight became keener and my perceptions more refined. The symbolism of art

evolved itself, as it were, from below the surface; and instead of beholding in paintings and statues mere studies of outward beauty, I came to know them as exponents of thought—as efforts after ideal truth—as aspirations which, because of their divineness, can never be wholly expressed; but whose suggestiveness is more eloquent than all the eloquence of words.

Thus a great change came upon my life—imperceptibly at first, and by gradual degrees; but deeply and surely. To apply myself to the study of medicine became daily more difficult and more distasteful to me. The boisterous pleasures of the Quartier Latin lost their charm for me. Day by day I gave myself up more and more passionately to the cultivation of my taste for poetry and art. I filled my little sitting-room with casts after the antique. I bought some good engravings for my walls, and hung up a copy of the Madonna di San Sisto above the table at which I wrote and read. All day long, wherever I might be—at the hospital, in the lecture-room, in the laboratory—I kept look-

ing longingly forward to the quiet evening by-and-by when, with shaded lamp and curtained window, I should again take up the studies of the night before.

Thus new aims opened out before me, and my thoughts flowed into channels ever wider and deeper. Already the first effervescence of youth seemed to have died off the surface of my life, as the "beaded bubbles" die off the surface of Champagne. I had tried society, and wearied of it. I had tried Bohemia, and found it almost as empty as the *Chaussée d'Antin*. And now that life which from boyhood I had ever looked upon as the happiest on earth, the life of the student, was mine. Could I have devoted it wholly and undividedly to those pursuits which were fast becoming to me as the life of my life, I would not have exchanged my lot for all the wealth of the Rothschilds. Somewhat indolent, perhaps, by nature, indifferent to achieve, ambitious only to acquire, I asked nothing better than a life given up to the worship of all that is beautiful in art, to the acquisition of knowledge, and to the develop-

ment of taste. Would the time ever come when I might realize my dream? Ah! who could tell? In the meanwhile . . . well, in the meanwhile, here was Paris—here were books, museums, galleries, schools, golden opportunities which, once past, might never come again. So I reasoned; so time went on; so I lived, plodding on by day in the Ecole de Medicine, but, when evening came, resuming my studies at the leaf turned down the night before, and, like the visionary in “The Pilgrims of the Rhine,” taking up my dream-life at the point where I had been last awakened.

CHAPTER III.

Guichet the Model.

TO the man who lives alone and walks about with his eyes open, the mere bricks and mortar of a great city are instinct with character. Buildings become to him like living creatures. The streets tell him tales. For him, the house-fronts are written over with hieroglyphics which, to the passing crowd, are either unseen or without meaning. Fallen grandeur, pretentious gentility, decent poverty, the infamy that wears a brazen front, and the crime that burrows in darkness—he knows them all at a glance. The patched window, the dingy blind, the shattered doorstep, the pot of mignonette on the garret ledge, are to him

as significant as the lines and wrinkles on a human face. He grows to like some houses and to dislike others, almost without knowing why—just as one grows to like or dislike certain faces in the parks and clubs. I remember now, as well as if it were yesterday, how, during the first weeks of my life in Paris, I fell in love at first sight with a wee *maisonnette* at the corner of a certain street overlooking the Luxembourg gardens—a tiny little house, with soft-looking blue silk window-curtains, and cream-coloured jalousies, and boxes of red and white geraniums at all the windows. I never knew who lived in that sunny little nest; I never saw a face at any of those windows; yet I used to go out of my way in the summer evenings to look at it, as one might go to look at a beautiful woman behind a stall in the market-place, or at a Madonna in a shop-window.

At the time about which I write, there was probably no city in Europe of which the street-scenery was so interesting as that of Paris. I have already described the Quar-

tier Latin, joyous, fantastic, out-at-elbows; a world in itself and by itself; unlike anything else in Paris or elsewhere. But there were other districts in the great city—now swept away and forgotten—as characteristic in their way as the Quartier Latin. There was the Ile de Saint Louis, for instance—a *Campo Santo* of decayed nobility—lonely, silent, fallen upon evil days, and haunted here and there by ghosts of departed Marquises and Abbés of the *vieille école*. There was the debateable land to the rear of the Invalids and the Champ de Mars. There was the Faubourg St. Germain, fast falling into the sere and yellow leaf, and going the way of the Ile de Saint Louis. There was the neighbourhood of the Boulevard d'Aulnay, and the Rue de la Roquette, ghastly with the trades of death; a whole Quartier of monumental sculptors, makers of iron crosses, weavers of funereal chaplets, and wholesale coffin-factors. And beside and apart from all this, there were (as in all great cities) districts of evil report and obscure topography—lost islets of crime, round

which flowed and circled the daily tide of Paris life ; flowed and circled, yet never penetrated. A dark arch here and there—the mouth of a foul alley—a riverside vista of gloom and squalor, marked the entrance to these Alsatias. Such an Alsatia was the Rue Pierre Lescôt, the Rue Sans Nom, and many more than I can now remember—streets into which no sane man would venture after nightfall without the escort of the police.

Into the border land of such a neighbourhood—a certain congeries of obscure and labyrinthine streets to the rear of the old Halles—I accompanied Franz Müller one wintry afternoon, about an hour before sunset, and perhaps some ten days after our evening in the Rue du Faubourg St. Denis. We were bound on an expedition of discovery, and the object of our journey was to find the habitat of Guichet the model.

“I am determined to get to the bottom of this Lenoir business,” said Müller, doggedly ; “and if the police won’t help me, I must help myself.”

“You have no case for the police,” I replied.

“So says the *chef de bureau* ; but I am of the opposite opinion. However, I shall make my case out clearly enough before long. This Guichet can help me, if he will. He knows Lenoir, and he knows something against him ; that is clear. You saw how cautious he was the other day. The difficulty will be to make him speak.”

“I doubt if you will succeed.”

“I don’t, *mon cher*. But we shall see. Then, again, I have another line of evidence open to me. You remember that orange-coloured rosette in the fellow’s button-hole?”

“Certainly I do.”

“Well, now, I happen, by the merest chance, to know what that rosette means. It is the ribbon of the third order of the Golden Palm of Mozambique—a Portuguese decoration. They give it to diplomatic officials, eminent civilians, distinguished foreigners, and the like. I know a fellow who has it, and who belongs to the Portuguese Legation here. *Eh bien !* I went

to him the other day, and asked him about our said friend—how he came by it, who he is, where he comes from, and so forth. My Portuguese repeats the name—elevates his eyebrows—in short, has never heard of such a person. Then he pulls down a big book from a shelf in the secretary's room—turns to a page headed 'Golden Palm of Mozambique'—runs his finger along the list of names—shakes his head, and informs me that no Lenoir is, or ever has been, received into the order. What do you say to that, now?"

"It is just what I should have expected; but still it is not a case for the police. It concerns the Portuguese minister; and the Portuguese minister is by no means likely to take any trouble about the matter. But why waste all this time and care? If I were you, I would let the thing drop. It is not worth the cost."

Müller looked grave.

"I would drop it this moment," he said, "if—if it were not for the girl."

"Who is still less worth the cost."

“ I know it,” he replied, impatiently. “ She has a pretty, sentimental Madonna face ; a sweet voice ; a gentle manner—*et voilà tout*. I’m not the least bit in love with her now. I might have been. I might have committed some great folly for her sake ; but that danger is past, *Dieu merci !* I couldn’t love a girl I couldn’t trust, and that girl is a flirt. A flirt of the worst sort, too—demure, serious, conventional. No, no ; my fancy for the fair Marie has evaporated ; but, for all that, I don’t relish the thought of what her fate might be if linked for life to an unscrupulous scoundrel like Lenoir. I must do what I can, my dear fellow—I must do what I can.”

We had by this time rounded the Halles, and were threading our way through one gloomy by-street after another. The air was chill, the sky low and rainy ; and already the yellow glow of an oil-lamp might be seen gleaming through the inner darkness of some of the smaller shops. Meanwhile, the dusk seemed to gather at our heels, and to thicken at every step.

"You are sure you know your way?" I asked presently, seeing Müller look up at the name at the corner of the street.

"Why, yes; I think I do," he answered, doubtfully.

"Why not inquire of that man just ahead?" I suggested.

He was a square-built, burly, shabby-looking fellow, and was striding along so fast that we had to quicken our pace in order to come up with him. All at once Müller fell back, laid his hand on my arm, and said:—

"Stop! It is Guichet himself. Let him go on, and we'll follow."

So we dropped into the rear and followed him. He turned presently to the right, and preceded us down a long and horribly ill-favoured street, full of mean cabarets and lodging-houses of the poorest class, where, painted in red letters on broken lamps above the doors, or printed on cards wafered against the window panes, one saw at almost every other house, the words, "*Ici on loge la nuit.*" At the end of this thoroughfare our unconscious guide

plunged into a still darker and fouler *impasse*, hung across from side to side with rows of dingy linen, and ornamented in the centre with a mound of decaying cabbage-leaves, potatoe-parings, oyster-shells, and the like. Here he made for a large tumble-down house that closed the alley at the farther end, and, still followed by ourselves, went in at an open doorway, and up a public staircase dimly lighted by a flickering oil-lamp at every landing. At his own door he paused, and just as he had turned the key, Müller accosted him.

“Is that you, Guichet?” he said. “Why, you are the very man I want! If I had come ten minutes sooner, I should have missed you.”

“Is it M’sieur Müller?” said Guichet, bending his heavy brows and staring at us in the gloom of the landing.

“Ay, and with me the friend you saw the other day. So, this is your den? May we come in?”

He had been standing till now with his hand on the key and the closed door at his

back, evidently not intending to admit us ; but thus asked, he pushed the door open, and said, somewhat ungraciously :—

“It is just that, M’sieur Müller—a den ; not fit for gentlemen like you. But you can go in, if you please.”

We did not wait for a second invitation, but went in immediately. It was a long, low, dark room, with a pale gleam of fading daylight struggling in through a tiny window at the farther end. We could see nothing at first but this gleam ; and it was not till Guichet had raked out the wood ashes on the hearth, and blown them into a red glow with his breath, that we could distinguish the form or position of anything in the room. Then, by the flicker of the fire, we saw a low truckle-bed close under the window ; a kind of bruised and battered seaman’s chest in the middle of the room ; a heap of fire-wood in one corner ; a pile of old packing-cases, old sail-cloth, old iron, and all kinds of rubbish in another ; a few pots and pans over the fire-place ; and a dilapidated stool or two standing about the room. Avoiding these

latter, we set ourselves down upon the edge of the chest ; while Guichet, having by this time lit a piece of candle-end in a tin sconce against the wall, stood before us with folded arms, and stared at us in silence.

“ I want to know, Guichet, if you can give me some sittings,” said Müller, by way of opening the conversation.

“ Depends on when, M’sieur Müller,” growled the model.

“ Well—next week, for the whole week.”

Guichet shook his head. He was engaged to Monsieur Flandrin *là bas*, for the next month, from twelve to three daily, and had only his mornings and evenings to dispose of ; in proof of which he pulled out a greasy note-book and showed where the agreement was formally entered. Müller made a grimace of disappointment.

“ That man’s head takes a deal of cutting off, *mon ami*,” he said. “ Aren’t you tired of playing executioner so long ?”

“ Not I, M’sieur. It’s all the same to me—executioner or victim, saint or devil.”

Müller, laughing, offered him a cigar.

“ You’ve posed for some queer characters in your time, Guichet,” said he.

“ Parbleu, M’sieur !”

“ But you’ve not been a model all your life ?”

“ Perhaps not, M’sieur.”

“ You’ve been a sailor once upon a time, haven’t you ?”

The model looked up quickly.

“ How did you know that ?” he said, frowning.

“ By a number of little things—by this, for instance,” replied Müller, kicking his heels against the sea-chest; “ by certain words you make use of now and then ; by the way you walk ; by the way you tie your cravat. *Que diable !* you look at me as if you took me for a sorcerer !”

The model shook his head.

“ I don’t understand it,” he said, slowly.

“ Nay, I could tell you more than that, if I liked,” said Müller, with an air of mystery.

“ About myself ?”

“ Ay, about yourself, and others.”

Guichet, having just lighted his cigar, forgot to put it to his lips.

“What others?” he asked, with a look half of dull bewilderment and half of apprehension.

Müller shrugged his shoulders.

“Pshaw!” said he; “I know more than you think I know, Guichet. There’s our friend, you know—he of whom I made the head t’other day you remember?”

The model, still looking at him, made no answer.

“Why didn’t you say at once where you had met him, and all the rest of it, *mon vieux*? You might have been sure I should find out for myself, sooner or later.”

The model turned abruptly towards the fire-place, and, leaning his head against the mantel-shelf, stood with his back towards us, looking down into the fire.

“You ask me why I did not tell you at once?” he said, very slowly.

“Ay—why not?”

“Why not? Because—because when a man has begun to lead an honest life, and

has gone on leading an honest life, as I have, for years, he is glad to put the past behind him—to forget it, and all belonging to it. How was I to guess you knew anything about—about that place *là bas*?”

“And why should I not know about it?” replied Müller, flashing a rapid glance at me.

Guichet was silent.

“What if I tell you that I am particularly interested in—that place *là bas*?”

“Well, that may be. People used to come sometimes, I remember—artists and writers, and so on.”

“Naturally.”

“But I don’t remember to have ever seen you, M’sieur Müller.”

“You did not observe me, *mon cher*—or it may have been before, or after your time.”

“Yes, that’s true,” replied Guichet, ponderingly. “How long ago was it, M’sieur Müller?”

Müller glanced at me again. His game, hitherto so easy, was beginning to grow difficult.

“Eh, *mon Dieu!*” he said, indifferently, “how can I tell? I have knocked about too much, now here, now there, in the course of my life, to remember in what particular year this or that event may have happened. I am not good at dates, and never was.”

“But you remember seeing me there?”

“Have I not said so?”

Guichet took a couple of turns about the room. He looked flushed and embarrassed.

“There is one thing I should like to know,” he said, abruptly. “Where was I? What was I doing when you saw me?”

Müller was at fault now, for the first time.

“Where were you?” he repeated. “Why, there—where we said just now. *Là bas.*”

“No, no—that’s not what I mean. Was I . . . was I in the uniform of the Garde Chiourme?”

The colour rushed into Müller’s face as, flashing a glance of exultation at me, he replied :—

“Assuredly, *mon ami*. In that, and no other.”

The model drew a deep breath.

“And Bras de Fer?” he said. “Was he working in the quarries?”

“Bras de Fer! Was that the name he went by in those days?”

“Ay—Bras de Fer—*alias* Coupe-gorge—*alias* Triphot—*alias* Lenoir—*alias* a hundred other names. Bras de Fer was the one he went by at Toulon—and a real devil he was in the Bagnes! He escaped three times, and was twice caught and brought back again. The third time he killed one sentry, injured another for life, and got clear off. That was five years ago, and I left soon after. I suppose, if you saw him in Paris the other day, he has kept clear of Toulon ever since.”

“But was he in for life?” said Müller, eagerly.

“*Travaux forcés à perpétuité*,” replied Guichet, touching his own shoulder significantly with the thumb of his right hand.

Müller sprang to his feet.

"Enough," he said. "That is all I wanted to know. Guichet, *mon cher*, I am your debtor for life. We will talk about the sittings when you have more time to dispose of. Adieu."

"But, M'sieur Müller, you won't get me into trouble!" exclaimed the model, eagerly. "You won't make any use of my words?"

"Why, supposing I went direct to the Préfecture, what trouble could I possibly get you into, *mon ami*?" replied Müller.

The model looked down in silence.

"You are a brave man. You do not fear the vengeance of Bras de Fer, or his friends?"

"No, M'sieur—it's not that."

"What is it, then?"

"M'sieur"

"Pshaw, man! Speak up."

"It is not that you would get me personally into trouble, M'sieur Müller," said Guichet, slowly. "I am no coward, I hope—a coward would make a bad Garde Chiourme at Toulon, I fancy. And I'm not an escaped *forçât*. But—but, you see, I've worked

my way into a connection here in Paris, and I've made myself a good name among the artists, and . . . and I hold to that good name above everything in the world."

"Naturally—rightly. But what has that to do with Lenoir?"

"Ah, M'sieur Müller, if you knew more about me, you would not need telling how much it has to do with him! I was not always a Garde Chiourme at Toulon. I was promoted to it after a time, for good conduct, you know, and that sort of thing. But—but I began differently—I began by wearing the prison dress, and working in the quarries."

"My good fellow," said Müller, gently, "I half suspected this—I am not surprised; and I respect you for having redeemed that past in the way you have redeemed it."

"Thank you, M'sieur Müller; but, you see, redeemed or unredeemed, I'd rather be lying at the bottom of the Seine than have it rise up against me now."

"We are men of honour," said Müller, "and your secret is safe with us."

“Not if you go to the Préfecture and inform against Bras de Fer on my words,” exclaimed the model, eagerly. “How can I appear against him—Guichet the model—Guichet the Garde Chiourme—Guichet the *forçât*? M’sieur Müller, I could never hold my head up again. It would be the ruin of me.”

“You shall not appear against him, and it shall not be the ruin of you, Guichet,” said Müller. “That I promise you. Only assure me that what you have said is strictly correct—that Bras de Fer and Lenoir are one and the same person—an escaped *forçât*, condemned for life to the galleys.”

“That’s as true, M’sieur Müller, as that God is in Heaven,” said the model, emphatically.

“Then I can prove it without your testimony—I can prove it by simply summoning any of the Toulon authorities to identify him.”

“Or by stripping his shirt off his back, and showing the brand on his left shoulder,” said Guichet. “There you’ll find it, T. F.

as large as life—and if it don't show at first, just you hit him a sharp blow with the flat of your hand, M'sieur Müller, and it will start out as red and fresh as if it had been done only six months ago. *Parbleu!* I remember the day he came in, and the look in his face when the hot iron hissed into his flesh! They roar like bulls, for the most part; but he never flinched or spoke. He just turned a shade paler under the tan, and that was all."

"Do you remember what his crime was?" asked Müller.

Guichet shook his head.

"Not distinctly," he said. "I only know that he was in for a good deal, and had a lot of things proved against him on his trial. But you can find all that out for yourself, easily enough. He was tried in Paris, about fourteen years ago, and it's all in print, if you only know where to look for it."

"Then I'll find it, if I have to wade through half the *Bibliothèque Nationale!*" said Müller. "Adieu, Guichet—you have done me a great service, and you may be

sure I will do nothing to betray you. Let us shake hands upon it."

The colour rushed into the model's swarthy cheeks.

"*Comment*, M'sieur Müller!" he said, hesitatingly. "You offer to shake hands with me—after what I have told you?"

"Ten times more willing than before, *mon ami*," said Müller. "Did I not tell you just now that I respected you for having redeemed that past, and shall I not give my hand where I give my respect?"

The model grasped his outstretched hand with a vehemence that made Müller wince again.

"Thank you," he said, in a low, deep voice. "Thank you. Death of my life! M'sieur Müller, I'd go to the galleys again for you, after this—if you asked me."

"Agreed. Only when I do ask you, it shall be to pay a visit of ceremony to Monsieur Bras de Fer, when he is safely lodged again at Toulon with a chain round his leg, and a cannon-ball at the end of it,"

And with this Müller turned away laugh-

ingly, and I followed him down the dimly lighted stairs.

“By Jove!” he said, “what a grip the fellow gave me! I’d as soon shake hands with the Commendatore in Don Giovanni.”

CHAPTER IV.

Number Two Hundred and Seven.



MÜLLER, when he so confidently proposed to visit Bras de Fer in his future retirement at Toulon, believed that he had only to lodge his information with the proper authorities, and see the whole affair settled out of hand. He had not taken the bureaucratic system into consideration; and he had forgotten how little positive evidence he had to offer. It was no easier then than now to inspire the official mind with either insight or decision; and the police of Paris, inasmuch as they in no wise differed from the police of to-day, yesterday, or to-morrow, were slow to understand, slow to believe, and slower still to act.

An escaped convict? Monsieur le Chef du Bureau, upon whom we took the liberty of waiting the next morning, could scarcely take in the bare possibility of such a fact. An escaped convict? Bah! no convict could possibly escape under the present admirable system. *Comment!* He effected his escape some years ago? How many years ago? In what yard, in what ward, under what number was he entered in the official books? For what offence was he convicted? Had Monsieur seen him at Toulon?—and was Monsieur prepared to swear that Lenoir and Bras de Fer were one and the same person? How! Monsieur proposed to identify a certain individual, and yet was incapable of replying to these questions! Would Monsieur be pleased to state upon what grounds he undertook to denounce the said individual, and what proof he was prepared to produce in confirmation of the same?

To all which official catechising, Müller, who (wanting Guichet's testimony) had nothing but his intense personal conviction to put forward, could only reply that he was

ready to pledge himself to the accuracy of his information ; and that if Monsieur the Chef du Bureau would be at the pains to call in any Toulon official of a few years' standing, he would undoubtedly find that the person now described as calling himself Lenoir, and the person commonly known in the Bagnes as Bras de Fer, were indeed "one and the same."

Whereupon Monsieur le Chef—a pompous personage, with a bald head and a white moustache—shrugged his shoulders, smiled incredulously, had the honour to point out to Monsieur that the Government could by no means be at the expense of conveying an inspector from Toulon to Paris on so shadowy and unsupported a statement, and politely bowed us out.

Thus rebuffed, Müller began to despair of present success ; whilst I, in default of any brighter idea, proposed that he should take legal advice on the subject. So we went to a certain avocat, in a little street adjoining the Ecole de Droit, and there purchased as much wisdom as might be

bought for the sum of five francs sterling.

The avocat, happily, was fertile in suggestions. This, he said, was not a case for a witness. Here was no question of appearing before a court. With the foregone offences of either Lenoir or Bras de Fer, we had nothing to do; and to convict them of such offences formed no part of our plan. We only sought to show that Lenoir and Bras de Fer were in truth "one and the same person;" and we could only do so upon the authority of some third party who had seen both. Now Monsieur Müller had seen Lenoir, but not Bras de Fer; and Guichet had seen Bras de Fer, but not Lenoir. Here then was the real difficulty; and here, he hoped, its obvious solution. Let Guichet be taken to some place where, being himself unseen, he may obtain a glimpse of Lenoir. This done, he can, in a private interview of two minutes, state his conviction to Monsieur the Chef de Bureau—*voilà tout!* If, however, the said Guichet can be persuaded by no considerations either of interest or justice, then another very simple course remains

open. Every newly-arrived convict in every penal establishment throughout France is photographed on his entrance into the Bagne, and these photographs are duly preserved for purposes of identification like the present. Supposing therefore Bras de Fer had not escaped from Toulon before the introduction of this system, his portrait would exist in the official books to this day, and might doubtless be obtained, if proper application were made through an official channel.

Armed with this information, and knowing that any attempt to induce Guichet to move further in the matter would be useless, we then went back to the Bureau, and with much difficulty succeeded in persuading M. le Chef to send to Toulon for the photograph. This done, we could only wait and be patient.

Briefly, then, we did wait and were patient—though the last condition was not easy; for even I, who was by no means disposed to sympathise with Müller in his solicitude for the fair Marie, could not but

feel a strange contagion of excitement in this *chasse au forçât*. And so a week or ten days went by, till one memorable afternoon, when Müller came rushing round to my rooms in hot haste, about an hour before the time when we usually met to go to dinner, and greeted me with—

“Good news, *mon vieux*! good news! The photograph has come—and I have been to the Bureau to see it—and I have identified my man—and he will be arrested to-night, as surely as that he carries T. F. on his shoulder!”

“You are certain he is the same?” I said.

“As certain as I am of my own face when I see it in the looking-glass.”

And then he went on to say that a party of soldiers were to be in readiness a couple of hours hence, in a shop commanding Madame Marôt’s door; that he, Müller, was to be there to watch with them till Lenoir either came out from or went into the house; and that as soon as he pointed him out to the serjeant in command, he was to be arrested, put into a cab waiting for the

purpose, and conveyed to La Roquette.

Behold us, then, at the time prescribed, lounging in the doorway of a small shop adjoining the private entrance to Madame Marôt's house ; our hands in our pockets ; our cigars in our mouths ; our whole attitude expressive of idleness and unconcern. The wintry evening has closed in rapidly. The street is bright with lamps, and busy with passers-by. The shop behind us is quite dark—so dark that not the keenest observer passing by could detect the dusky group of soldiers sitting on the counter within, or the gleaming of the musket-barrels which rest between their knees. The serjeant in command, a restless, black-eyed, intelligent little Gascon, about five-feet four in height, with a revolver stuck in his belt, paces impatiently to and fro, and whistles softly between his teeth. The men, four in number, whisper together from time to time, or swing their feet in silence.

Thus the minutes go by heavily ; for it is weary work waiting in this way, uncertain how long the watch may last, and not daring

to relax the vigilance of eye and ear for a single moment. It may be for an hour, or for many hours, or it may be for only a few minutes—who can tell? Of Lenoir's daily haunts and habits we know nothing. All we do know is that he is wont to be out all day, sometimes returning only to dress and go out again; sometimes not coming home till very late at night; sometimes absenting himself for a day and a night, or two days and two nights together. With this uncertain prospect before us, therefore, we wait and watch, and watch and wait, counting the hours as they strike, and scanning every face that gleams past in the lamplight.

So the first hour goes by, and the second. Ten o'clock strikes. The traffic in the street begins perceptibly to diminish. Shops close here and there (Madame Marôt's shutters have been put up by the boy in the oilskin apron more than an hour ago), and the *chiffonnier*, sure herald of the quieter hours of the night, flits by with rake and lanthorn, observant of the gutters.

The soldiers on the counter yawn audibly

from time to time ; and the serjeant, who is naturally of an impatient disposition, exclaims, for the twentieth time, with an inexhaustible variety, however, in the choice of expletives :—

“ *Mais, nom de deux cent mille pétards !* will this man of ours never come ? ”

To which inquiry, though not directly addressed to myself, I reply, as I have already replied once or twice before, that he may come immediately, or that he may not come for hours ; and that all we can do is to wait and be patient. In the midst of which explanation, Müller suddenly lays his hand on my arm, makes a sign to the serjeant, and peers eagerly down the street.

There is a man coming up quickly on the opposite side of the way. For myself, I could recognise no one at such a distance, especially by night ; but Müller’s keener eye, made keener still by jealousy, identifies him at a glance.

It is Lenoir.

He wears a frock coat closely buttoned, and comes on with a light, rapid step, sus-

pecting nothing. The serjeant gives the word—the soldiers spring to their feet—I draw back into the gloom of the shop—and only Müller remains, smoking his cigarette and lounging against the door-post.

Then Lenoir crosses over, and Müller, affecting to observe him for the first time, looks up, and without lifting his hat, says loudly :—

“*Comment !* have I the honour of saluting Monsieur Lenoir?”

Whereupon Lenoir, thrown off his guard by the suddenness of the address, hesitates—seems about to reply—checks himself—quickens his pace, and passes without a word.

The next instant he is surrounded. The butt ends of four muskets rattle on the pavement—the serjeant’s hand is on his shoulder—the serjeant’s voice rings in his ear.

“Number two hundred and seven, you are my prisoner !”

CHAPTER V.

The End of Bras de Fer.

ENOIR'S first impulse was to struggle in silence ; then, finding escape hopeless, he folded his arms and submitted.

"So, it is Monsieur Müller who has done me this service," he said coldly ; but with a flash in his eye like the sudden glint in the eye of a cobra di capello. "I will take care not to be unmindful of the obligation."

Then, turning impatiently upon the serjeant :—

"Have you no carriage at hand ?" he said, sharply ; "or do you want to collect a crowd in the street ?"

The cab, however, which had been waiting a few doors lower down, drove up while

he was speaking. The serjeant hurried him in; the half-dozen loiterers who had already gathered about us pressed eagerly forward; two of the soldiers and the serjeant got inside; Müller and I scrambled up beside the driver; word was given "to the Prefecture of Police;" and we drove rapidly away down the Rue du Faubourg St. Denis, through the arch of Louis Quatorze, out upon the bright noisy Boulevard, and on through thoroughfares as brilliant and crowded as at midday, towards the quays and the river.

Arrived at the Quai des Orfèvres, we alighted at the Prefecture, and were conducted through a series of ante-rooms and corridors into the presence of the same bald-headed Chef de Bureau whom we had seen on each previous occasion. He looked up as we came in, pressed the spring of a small bell that stood upon his desk, and growled something in the ear of a clerk who answered the summons.

"Serjeant," he said pompously, "bring the prisoner under the gas-burner."

Lenoir, without waiting to be brought, took a couple of steps forward, and placed himself in the light.

Monsieur le Chef then took out his double eye-glass, and proceeded to compare Lenoir's face, feature by feature, with a photograph which he took out of his pocket-book for the purpose.

"Are you prepared, Monsieur," he said, addressing Müller for the first time—"are you, I say, prepared to identify the prisoner upon oath?"

"Within certain limitations—yes," replied Müller.

"Certain limitations!" exclaimed the Chef, testily. "What do you mean by 'certain limitations'? Here is the man whom you accuse, and here is the photograph. Are you, I repeat, prepared to make your deposition before Monsieur le Préfet that they are one and the same person?"

"I am neither more nor less prepared, Monsieur," said Müller, "than you are; or than Monsieur le Préfet, when he has the opportunity of judging. As I have already

had the honour of informing you, I saw the prisoner for the first time about two months since. Having reason to believe that he was living in Paris under an assumed name, and wearing a decoration to which he had no right, I prosecuted certain inquiries about him. The result of those inquiries led me to conclude that he was an escaped convict from the Bagnes of Toulon. Never having seen him at Toulon, I was unable to prove this fact without assistance. You, Monsieur, have furnished that assistance, and the proof is now in your hand. It only remains for Monsieur le Préfet and yourself to decide upon its value."

"Give me the photograph, Monsieur Marmot," said a pale little man in blue spectacles, who had come in unobserved from a door behind us, while Müller was speaking.

The bald-headed Chef jumped up with great alacrity, bowed like a second Sir Pertinax, and handed over the photograph.

"The peculiar difficulty of this case, Monsieur le Préfet" . . . he began.

The Préfet waved his hand.

“Thanks, Monsieur Marmot,” he said, “I know all the particulars of this case. You need not trouble to explain them. So this is the photograph forwarded from Toulon. Well—well! Serjeant, strip the prisoner’s shoulders.”

A sudden quiver shot over Lenoir’s face at this order, and his cheek blanched under the tan; but he neither spoke nor resisted. The next moment his coat and waistcoat were lying on the ground; his shirt, torn in the rough handling, was hanging round his loins, and he stood before us naked to the waist, lean, brown, muscular—a torso of an athlete done in bronze.

We pressed round eagerly. Monsieur le Chef put up his double eye-glass; Monsieur le Préfet took off his blue spectacles.

“So—so,” he said, pointing with the end of his glasses towards a whitish, indefinite kind of scar on Lenoir’s left shoulder, “here is a mark like a burn. Is this the brand?”

The serjeant nodded.

“V’là, M’sieur le Préfet!” he said, and struck the spot smartly with his open palm.

Instantly the smitten place turned livid, while from the midst of it, like the handwriting on the wall, the fatal letters T. F. sprang out in characters of fire.

Lenoir flashed a savage glance upon us, and checked the imprecation that rose to his lips. Monsieur le Préfet, with a little nod of satisfaction, put on his glasses again, went over to the table, took out a printed form from a certain drawer, dipped a pen in the ink, and said :—

“Serjeant, you will take this order, and convey Number Two Hundred and Seven to the Bicêtre, there to remain till Thursday next, when he will be drafted back to Toulon by the convict train, which leaves two hours after midnight. Monsieur Müller, the Government is indebted to you for the assistance you have rendered the executive in this matter. You are probably aware that the prisoner is a notorious criminal, guilty of one proved murder, and several cases of forgery, card-sharping, and the like. The Government is also indebted to Monsieur Marmot” (here he inclined his head to the

bald-headed Chef), "who has acted with his usual zeal and intelligence."

Monsieur Marmot, murmuring profuse thanks, bowed and bowed again, and followed Monsieur le Préfet obsequiously to the door. On the threshold, the great little man paused, turned, and said very quietly: "You understand, serjeant, this prisoner does *not* escape again;" and so vanished, leaving Monsieur Marmot still bowing in the doorway.

Then the serjeant hurried on Lenoir's coat and waistcoat, clapped a pair of handcuffs on his wrists, thrust his hat on his head, and prepared to be gone; Monsieur, the bald-headed, looking on, meanwhile, with the utmost complacency, as if taking to himself all the merit of discovery and capture.

"Pardon, Messieurs," said the serjeant, when all was ready. "Pardon—but here is a fellow for whom I am responsible now, and who must be strictly looked after. I shall have to put a gendarme on the box from here to Bicêtre, instead of you two gentlemen."

“All right, *mon ami*,” said Müller. “I suppose we should not have been admitted if we had gone with you?”

“Nay, I could pass you in, Messieurs, if you cared to see the affair to the end, and followed in another *fiacre*.”

So we said we would see it to the end, and following the prisoner and his guard through all the rooms and corridors by which we had come, picked up a second cab on the Quai des Orfèvres, just outside the Prefecture of Police.

It was now close upon midnight. The sky was flecked with driving clouds. The moon had just risen above the towers of Notre Dame. The quays were silent and deserted. The river hurried along, swirling and turbulent. The serjeant's cab led the way, and the driver, instead of turning back towards the Pont Neuf, followed the line of the quays along the southern bank of the Ile de la Cité; passing the Morgue—a mass of sinister shadow; passing the Hôtel Dieu; traversing the Parvis Notre Dame; and making for the long bridge, then called the

Pont Louis Philippe, which connects the two river-islands with the northern half of Paris.

"It is a wild-looking night," said Müller, as we drove under the mountainous shadow of Notre Dame and came out again in sight of the river.

"And it is a wild business to be out upon," I added. "I wonder if this is the end of it?"

The words were scarcely past my lips when the door of the cab ahead flew suddenly open, and a swift something, more like a shadow than a man, darted across the moonlight, sprang upon the parapet of the bridge, and disappeared!

In an instant we were all out—all rushing to and fro—all shouting—all wild with surprise and confusion.

"One man to the Pont d'Arcole!" thundered the serjeant, running along the parapet, revolver in hand. "One to the Quai Bourbon!—one to the Pont de la Cité! Watch up stream and down! The moment he shows his head above water, fire!"

“But, in heaven’s name, how did he escape?” exclaimed Müller.

“*Grand Dieu!* who can tell—unless he is the very devil?” cried the serjeant, distractedly. “The handcuffs were on the floor, the door was open, and he was gone in a breath! Hold! What’s that?”

The soldier on the Pont de la Cité gave a shout and fired. There was a splash—a plunge—a rush to the opposite parapet.

“There he goes!”

“Where?”

“He has dived again!”

“Look—look yonder—between the floating-bath and the bank!”

The serjeant stood motionless, his revolver ready cocked—the water swirled and eddied, eddied and parted—a dark dot rose for a second to the surface!

Three shots fired at the same moment (one by the serjeant, two by the soldiers) rang sharply through the air, and were echoed with startling suddenness again and again from the buttressed walls of Notre Dame. Ere the last echo had died away,

or the last faint smoke-wreath had faded, two boats were pulling to the spot, and all the quays were alive with a fast-gathering crowd. The serjeant beckoned to the gendarme who had come upon the box.

“Bid the boatmen drag the river just here between the two bridges,” he said, “and bring the body up to the Prefecture.” Then, turning to Müller and myself, “I am sorry to trouble you again, Messieurs,” he said, “but I must ask you to come back once more to the Quai des Orfèvres, to depose to the facts which have just happened.”

“But is the man shot, or has he escaped?” asked a breathless bystander.

“Both,” said the serjeant, with a grim smile, replacing his revolver in his belt. “He has escaped Toulon ; but he has gone to the bottom of the Seine with something like six ounces of lead in his skull.”

CHAPTER VI.

The Enigma of the Third Story.

Who ever loved, that loved not at first sight?

MARLOWE.

IN Paris, a lodging-house (or, as they prefer to style it, a *hôtel meublé*) is a little town in itself; a beehive swarming from basement to attic; a miniature model of the great world beyond, with all its loves and hatreds, jealousies, aspirations, and struggles. Like that world, it contains several grades of society, but with this difference, that those who therein occupy the loftiest position are held in the lowest estimation. Thus, the fifth-floor lodgers turn up their noses at the inhabitants of the attics; while the fifth floor is in its turn scorned by the fourth, and the fourth is

despised by the third, and the third by the second, down to the magnificent dwellers on the *premier étage*, who live in majestic disdain of everybody above or beneath them, from the grisettes in the garret, to the *concierge* who has care of the cellars.

The house in which I lived in the Cité Bergère was, in fact, a double house, and contained no fewer than thirty tenants, some of whom had wives, children, and servants. It consisted of six floors, and each floor contained from eight to ten rooms. These were let in single chambers, or in suites, as the case might be; and on the outer doors opening round the landings were painted the names, or affixed the visiting-cards, of the dwellers within. My own third-floor neighbours were four in number. To my left lived a certain Monsieur and Madame Lemercier, a retired couple from Alsace. Opposite their door, on the other side of the well staircase, dwelt one Monsieur Cliquot, an elderly *employé* in some public office; next to him, Signor Milanese, an Italian refugee who played in the orchestra at the

Variétés every night, was given to practising the violoncello by day, and wore as much hair about his face as a Skye-terrier. Lastly, in the apartment to my right resided a lady upon whose door was nailed a small visiting-card engraved with these words—

MLLE. HORTENSE DUFRESNOY,

Teacher of Languages.

I had resided in the house for months before I ever beheld this Mademoiselle Hortense Dufresnoy. When I did at last encounter her upon the stairs one dusk autumnal evening, she wore a thick black veil, and, darting past me like a bird on the wing, disappeared down the staircase in fewer moments than I take to write of it. I scarcely observed her at the time. I had no more curiosity to learn whether the face under that veil was pretty or plain than I cared to know whether the veil itself was Shetland or Chantilly. At that time Paris

was yet new to me : Madame de Marignan's evil influence was about me ; and, occupied as my time and thoughts were with unprofitable matters, I took no heed of my fellow-lodgers. Save, indeed, when the groans of that much-tortured violoncello woke me in the morning to an unwelcome consciousness of the vicinity of Signor Milanese, I should scarcely have remembered that I was not the only inhabitant of the third story.

Now, however, that I spent all my evenings in my own quiet room, I became, by imperceptible degrees, interested in the unseen inhabitant of the adjoining apartment. Sometimes, when the house was so still that the very turning of the page sounded unnaturally loud, and the mere falling of a cinder startled me, I heard her in her chamber, singing softly to herself. Every night I saw the light from her window streaming out over the balcony and touching the evergreens with a midnight glow. Often and often, when it was so late that even I had given up study and gone to bed, I heard her reading aloud, or pacing to and fro to the

measure of her own recitations. Listen as I would, I could only make out that these recitations were poetical fragments—I could only distinguish a certain chanted metre, the chiming of an occasional rhyme, the rising and falling of a voice more than commonly melodious.

This vague interest gave place by-and-by to active curiosity. I resolved to question Madame Bouïsse, the *concierge*; and as she, good soul! loved gossip not wisely, but too well, I soon knew all the little she had to tell.

Mademoiselle Hortense, it appeared, was the enigma of the third story. She had resided in the house for more than two years. She earned her living by her labour; went out teaching all the day; sat up at night, studying and writing; had no friends; received no visitors; was as industrious as a bee, and as proud as a princess. Books and flowers were her only friends, and her only luxuries. Poor as she was, she was continually filling her shelves with the former, and supplying her balcony with the

latter. She lived frugally, drank no wine, was singularly silent and reserved, and "like a real lady," said the fat *concierger*, "paid her rent to the minute."

This, and no more, had Madame Bouïsse to tell. I had sought her in her own little retreat at the foot of the public staircase. It was a very wet afternoon, and under pretext of drying my boots by the fire, I stayed to make conversation and elicit what information I could. Now Madame Bouïsse's sanctuary was a queer, dark, stuffy little cupboard devoted to many heterogeneous uses, and it "served her for parlour, kitchen, and all." In one corner stood that famous article of furniture which became "a bed by night, a chest of drawers by day." Adjoining the bed was the fireplace; near the fireplace stood a corner cupboard filled with crockery and surmounted by a grand ormolu clock, singularly at variance with the rest of the articles. A table, a warming-pan, and a couple of chairs completed the furniture of the room, which, with all its contents, could scarcely have

measured more than eight feet square. On a shelf inside the door stood thirty flat candlesticks; and on a row of nails just beneath them, hung two and twenty bright brass chamber-door keys—whereby an apt arithmetician might have divined that exactly two and twenty lodgers were out in the rain, and only eight housed comfortably within doors.

“And how old should you suppose this lady to be?” I asked, leaning idly against the table whereon Madame Bouïsse was preparing an unsavoury dish of veal and garlic.

The *concierge* shrugged her ponderous shoulders.

“Ah, bah, M’sieur, I am no judge of age,” said she.

“Well—is she pretty?”

“I am no judge of beauty, either,” grinned Madame Bouïsse.

“But, my dear soul,” I expostulated, “you have eyes!”

“Yours are younger than mine, *mon enfant*,” retorted the fat *concierge*; “and, as I see Mam’selle Hortense coming up to the

door, I'd advise you to make use of them for yourself."

And there, sure enough, was a tall and slender girl, dressed all in black, pausing to close up her umbrella at the threshold of the outer doorway. A porter followed her, carrying a heavy parcel. Having deposited this in the passage, he touched his cap and stated his charge. The young lady took out her purse, turned over the coins, shook her head, and finally came up to Madame's little sanctuary.

"Will you be so obliging, Madame Bouisse," she said, "as to lend me a piece of ten sous? I have no small change left in my purse."

How shall I describe her? If I say that she was not particularly beautiful, I do her less than justice; for she was beautiful, with a pale, grave, serious beauty, unlike the ordinary beauty of woman. But even this, her beauty of feature, and colour, and form, was eclipsed and overborne by that "true beauty of the soul" which outshines all other, as the sun puts out the stars.

There was in her face—or, perhaps, rather in her expression—an indefinable something that came upon me almost like a memory. Had I seen that face in some forgotten dream of long ago? Brown-haired was she, and pale, with a brow “as chaste as ice, as pure as snow,” and eyes—

“In whose orb a shadow lies,
Like the dusk in evening skies!”

Eyes lit from within, large, clear, lustrous, with a meaning in them so profound and serious that it was almost sorrowful,—like the eyes of Giotto’s saints and Cimabue’s Madonnas.

But I cannot describe her—

“For oh, her looks had something excellent
That wants a name!”

I can only look back upon her with “my mind’s eye,” trying to see her as I saw her then for the first time, and striving to recall my first impressions.

Madame Bouïsse, meanwhile, searched in all the corners of her ample pockets, turned out her table-drawer, dived into the recesses

of her husband's empty garments, and peeped into every ornament upon the chimney-piece; but in vain. There was no such thing as a ten-sous piece to be found.

"Pray, M'sieur Basil," said she, "have you one?"

"One what?" I ejaculated, startled out of my reverie.

"Why, a ten-sous piece, to be sure. Don't you see that Mam'selle Hortense is waiting in her wet shoes, and that I have been hunting for the last five minutes, and can't find one anywhere?"

Blushing like a schoolboy, and stammering some unintelligible excuse, I pulled out a handful of francs and half-francs, and produced the coin required.

"*Dame!*" said the *concierge*. "This comes of using one's eyes too well, my young Monsieur. Hem! I'm not so blind but that I can see as far as my neighbours."

Mademoiselle Hortense had fortunately gone back to settle with the porter, so this observation passed unheard. The man being dismissed, she came back, carrying the parcel.

It was evidently heavy, and she put it down on the nearest chair.

"I fear, Madame Bouïsse," she said, "that I must ask you to help me with this. I am not strong enough to carry it upstairs."

More alert this time, I took a step in advance, and offered my services.

"Will Mademoiselle permit me to take it?" I said. "I am going upstairs."

She hesitated.

"Many thanks," she said, reluctantly, "but"

"But Madame Bouïsse is busy," I urged, "and the *pot au feu* will spoil if she leaves it on the fire."

The fat *concierge* nodded, and patted me on the shoulder.

"Let him carry the parcel, Mam'selle Hortense," she chuckled. "Let him carry it. M'sieur is your neighbour, and neighbours should be neighbourly. Besides," she added, in an audible aside, "he is a *bon garçon*—an Englishman—and a book-student like yourself."

The young lady bent her head, civilly, but

proudly. Compelled, as it seemed, to accept my help, she evidently wished to show me that I must nevertheless put forward no claim to further intercourse—not even on the plea of neighbourhood. I understood her, and, taking up the parcel, followed her in silence to her door on the third story. Here she paused and thanked me.

“Pray let me carry it in for you,” I said.

Again she hesitated ; but only for an instant. Too well-bred not to see that a refusal would now be a discourtesy, she unlocked the door, and held it open.

The first room was an ante-chamber ; the second a *salon* somewhat larger than my own, with a door to the right, leading into what I supposed would be her bedroom. At a glance, I took in all the details of her home. There was her writing-table laden with books and papers, her desk, and her pile of manuscripts. At one end of the room stood a piano doing duty as a side-board, and looking as if it were seldom opened. Some water-colour drawings were pinned against the walls, and a well-filled

book-case stood in a recess beside the fireplace. Nothing escaped me—not even the shaded reading-lamp, nor the plain ebony time-piece, nor the bronze Apollo on the bracket above the piano, nor the sword over the mantelpiece, which seemed a strange ornament in the study of a gentle lady. Besides all this, there were books everywhere, heaped upon the tables, ranged on shelves, piled in corners, and scattered hither and thither in most admired disorder. It was, however, the only disorder there.

I longed to linger, but dared not. Having laid the parcel down upon the nearest chair, there was nothing left for me to do but to take my leave. Mademoiselle Dufresnoy still kept her hand upon the door.

“Accept my best thanks, sir,” she said in English, with a pretty foreign accent, that seemed to give new music to the dear familiar tongue.

“You have nothing to thank me for, Mademoiselle,” I replied.

She smiled, proudly still, but very sweetly, and closed the door upon me.

I went back to my room ; it had become suddenly dark and desolate. I tried to read ; but all subjects seemed alike tedious and unprofitable. I could fix my attention to nothing ; and so, becoming restless, I went out again, and wandered about the dusky streets till evening fairly set in, and the shops were lighted, and the tide of passers-by began to flow faster in the direction of boulevard and theatre.

The soft light of her shaded lamp streamed from her window when I came back, nor faded thence till two hours after midnight. I watched it all the long evening, stealing out from time to time upon my balcony, which adjoined her own, and welcoming the cool night air upon my brow. For I was fevered and disquieted, I knew not why, and my heart was stirred within me, strangely and sweetly.

Such was my first meeting with Hortense Dufresnoy. No incident of it has since faded from my memory. Brief as it was, it had already turned all the current of my life. I had fallen in love at first sight.

Yes—in love ; for love it was—real, passionate, earnest ; a love destined to be the master-passion of all my future years.

CHAPTER VII.


A Chronicle about Froissart.

See, Lucius, here's the book I sought for so !

JULIUS CÆSAR.

But all be that he was a philosopfre,
Yet hadde he but litel gold in cofre,
But all that he might of his frends hente,
On bokes and on lerning he is spente.

CHAUCER.

“OVE-IN-IDLENESS” has passed into a proverb, and lovers, somehow, are not generally supposed to be industrious. I, however, worked none the less zealously for being in love. I applied only the more closely to my studies, both medical and literary, and made better progress in both than I had made before. I was not ambitious; but I had many incentives to work. I was anxious to satisfy my

father. I earnestly desired to efface every unfavourable impression from the mind of Dr. Chéron, and to gain, if possible, his esteem. I was proud of the friendship of Madame de Courcelles, and wished to prove the value that I placed upon her good opinion. Above all, I had a true and passionate love of learning—not that love which leadeth on to fame; but rather that self-abandoning devotion which exchangeth willingly the world of action for the world of books, and, for an uninterrupted communion with the “souls of all that men held wise,” bartereth away the society of the living.

Little gregarious by nature, Paris had already ceased to delight me in the same way that it had delighted me at first. A “retired leisure,” and the society of the woman whom I loved, grew to be the day-dream of my solitary life. And still, ever more and more plainly, it became evident to me that for the career of the student I was designed by nature. Bayle, Magliabecchi of Florence, Isaac Reed, Sir Thomas Brown, Montaigne—those were the men whose lot

in life I envied—those the literary anchorites in whose steps I would fain have followed.

But this was not to be; so I worked on, rose early, studied late, gained experience, took out my second inscription with credit, and had the satisfaction of knowing that I was fast acquiring the good opinion of Dr. Chéron. Thus Christmas passed by, and January with its bitter winds; and February set in, bright but frosty. And still, without encouragement or hope, I went on loving Hortense Dufresnoy,

My opportunities of seeing her were few and brief. A passing bow in the hall, or a distant “good evening” as we passed upon the stairs, for some time made up the sum of our intercourse. Gradually, however, a kind of formal acquaintance sprang up between us; an acquaintance fostered by trifles and dependent on the idlest, or what seemed the idlest, casualties. I say “seemed,” for often that which to her appeared the work of chance was the result of elaborate contrivance on my part. She

little knew, when I met her on the staircase, how I had been listening for the last hour to catch the echo of her step. She little dreamed when I encountered her at the corner of the street, how I had been concealed, till that moment, in the *café* over the way, ready to dart out as soon as she appeared in sight. I would then affect either a polite unconcern, or an air of judicious surprise, or pretend not to lift my eyes at all till she was nearly past; and I think I must have been a very fair actor, for it all succeeded capitally, and I am not aware that she ever had the least suspicion of the truth. Let me, however, recall one incident over which I had no control, and which did more towards promoting our intercourse than all the rest.

It is a cold, bright morning in February. There is a brisk exhilaration in the air. The windows and gilded balconies sparkle in the sun, and it is pleasant to hear the frosty ring of one's boots upon the pavement. It is a fête to-day. Nothing is doing in the lecture-rooms, and I have the whole day before me.

Meaning, therefore, to enjoy it over the fire and a book, I wisely begin it by a walk.

From the *Cité Bergère*, out along the right-hand side of the *Boulevards*, down past the front of the *Madeleine*, across the *Place de la Concorde*, and up the *Champs Elysées* as far as the *Arc de Triomphe*; this is the route I take in going. Arrived at the arch, I cross over, and come back by the same roads, but on the other side of the way. I have a motive in this. There is a certain second-hand book-shop on the opposite side of the *Boulevard des Italiens*, which draws me by a wholly irresistible attraction. Had I started on that side, I should have gone no further. I should have looked, lingered, purchased, and gone home to read. But I know my weakness. I have reserved the book-shop for my return journey, and now, rewarded and triumphant, compose myself for a quiet study of its treasures.

And what a book-shop it is! Not only are its windows filled—not only are its walls a very perspective of learning—but square pillars of volumes are built up on either

side of the door, and an immense supplementary library is erected in the open air, down all the length of a dead wall adjoining the house.

Here then I pause, turning over the leaves of one volume, reading the title of another, studying the personal appearance of a third, and weighing the merits of their authors against the contents of my purse. And when I say "personal appearance," I say it advisedly; for book-hunters, are skilled Lavaters in their way, and books, like men, attract or repel at first sight. Thus it happens that I love a portly book, in a sober coat of calf, but hate a thin, smart volume, in a gaudy binding. The one promises to be philosophic, learnedly witty, or solidly instructive; the other is tolerably certain to be pert and shallow, and reminds me of a coxcombical lacquey in bullion and red plush. On the same principle, I respect leaves soiled and dog's-eared, but mistrust gilt edges; love an old volume better than a new; prefer a spacious book-stall to all the unpurchased stores of Paternoster Row; and buy every

book that I possess at second-hand. Nay, that it is second-hand is in itself a passport to my favour. Somebody has read it before; therefore it is readable. Somebody has derived pleasure from it before; therefore I open it with a student's sympathy, and am disposed to be indulgent ere I have perused a single line. There are cases, however, in which I incline to luxury of binding. Just as I had rather have my historians in old calf and my chroniclers in black letter, so do I delight to see my modern poets, the Benjamins of my affections, clothed in coats of many colours. For them no moroccas are too rich, and no "toolings" too elaborate. I love to see them smiling on me from the shelves of my book-cases, as glowing and varied as the sunset through a painted oriel.

Standing here, then, to-day, dipping first into this work and then into that, I light upon a very curious and interesting edition of *Froissart*—an edition full of quaint engravings, and printed in the obsolete spelling of two hundred years ago. The book is

both a treasure and a bargain, being marked up at five and twenty francs. Only those who haunt book-stalls and luxuriate in old editions can appreciate the satisfaction with which I survey

“That weight of wood, with leathern coat o’erlaid,
Those ample clasps of solid metal made,
The close press’d leaves unclosed for many an age,
The dull red edging of the well-filled page,
And the broad back, with stubborn ridges roll’d,
Where yet the title stands in tarnished gold !”

They only can sympathise in the eagerness with which I snatch up the precious volume, the haste with which I count out the five and twenty francs, the delight with which I see the dealer’s hand close on the sum, and know that the book is legally and indisputably mine ! Then how lovingly I embrace it under my arm, and, taking advantage of my position as a purchaser, stroll leisurely round the inner warehouse, still courting that literary world which (in a library, at least) always turns its back upon its worshipper !

“Pray, Monsieur,” says a gentle voice at the door, “where is that old *Froissart* that

I saw outside about a quarter of an hour ago?"

"Just sold, Madame," replies the bookseller, promptly.

"Oh, how unfortunate!—and I only went home for the money!" exclaims the lady in a tone of real disappointment.

Selfishly exultant, I hug the book more closely, turn to steal a glance at my defeated rival, and recognise—Mademoiselle Dufresnoy.

She does not see me. I am standing in the inner gloom of the shop, and she is already turning away. I follow her at a little distance; keep her in sight all the way home; let her go into the house some few seconds in advance; and then, scaling three stairs at a time, overtake her at the door of her apartment.

Flushed and breathless, I stand beside her with *Froissart* in my hand.

"Pardon, Mademoiselle," I say, hurriedly, "for having involuntarily forestalled you just now. I had just bought the book you wished to purchase."

She looks at me with evident surprise and some coldness ; but says nothing.

“ And I am rejoiced to have this opportunity of transferring it to you.”

Mademoiselle Dufresnoy makes a slight but decided gesture of refusal.

“ I would not deprive you of it, Monsieur,” she says promptly, “ upon any consideration.”

“ But, Mademoiselle, unless you allow me to relinquish it in your favour, I beg to assure you that I shall take the book back to the bookseller and exchange it for some other.”

“ I cannot conceive why you should do that, Monsieur.”

“ In order, Mademoiselle, that you may still have it in your power to become the purchaser.”

“ And yet you wished to possess¹ the book, or you would not have bought it.”

“ I would not have bought it, Mademoiselle, if I had known that I should disappoint a—a lady by doing so.”

I was on the point of saying “ if I had

known that I should disappoint you by doing so," but hesitated, and checked myself in time.

A half-mocking smile flitted across her lips.

"Monsieur is too self-sacrificing," she said. "Had I first bought the book, I should have kept it—being a woman. Reverse the case as you will, and show me any just reason why you should not do the same—being a man?"

"Nay, the merest by-law of courtesy . . ." I began, hesitatingly.

"Do not think me ungracious, Monsieur," she interrupted, "if I hold that these so-called laws of courtesy are in truth but concessions, for the most part, from the strength of your sex to the weakness of ours."

"*Eh bien*, Mademoiselle—what then?"

"Then, Monsieur, may there not be some women—myself, for instance—who do not care to be treated like children?"

"Pardon, Mademoiselle, but are you stating the case quite fairly? Is it not rather that we desire not to efface the last

lingering tradition of the age of chivalry—not to reduce to prose the last faint echoes of that poetry which tempered the sword of the Crusader and inspired the song of the Trouvère?”

“Were it not better that the new age created a new code and a new poetry?” said Mademoiselle Dufresnoy.

“Perhaps; but I confess I love old forms and usages, and cling to creeds outworn. Above all, to that creed which in the age of powder and compliment, no less than in the age of chivalry, enjoined absolute devotion and courtesy towards women.”

“Against mere courtesy reasonably exercised and in due season, I have nothing to say,” replied Mademoiselle Dufresnoy; “but the half-barbarous homage of the Middle Ages is as little to my taste as the scarcely less barbarous refinement of the Addison and Georgian periods. Both are alike unsound, because both have a basis of insincerity. Just as there is a mock refinement more vulgar than simple vulgarity, so are there courtesies which humiliate and compliments that offend.”

“Mademoiselle is pleased to talk in paradoxes,” said I.

Mademoiselle unlocked her door, and turning towards me with the same half-mocking smile and the same air of raillery, said—

“Monsieur, it is written in your English histories that when John le Bon was taken captive after the battle of Cressy, the Black Prince rode bareheaded before him through the streets of London, and served him at table as the humblest of his attendants. But for all that, was John any the less a prisoner, or the Black Prince any the less a conqueror?”

“You mean, perhaps, that you reject all courtesy based on mere ceremonial. Let me then put the case of this *Froissart* more plainly—as I would have done from the first, had I dared to speak the simple truth.”

“And that is?”

“That it will give me more pleasure to resign the book to you, Mademoiselle, than to possess it myself.”

Mademoiselle Dufresnoy colours up, looks

both haughty and amused, and ends by laughing.

“In truth, Monsieur,” she says merrily, “if your politeness threatened at first to be too universal, it ends by becoming unnecessarily particular.”

“Say rather, Mademoiselle, that you will not have the book on any terms!” I exclaim impatiently.

“Because you have not yet offered it to me upon any just or reasonable grounds.”

“Well, then, bluntly and frankly, as student to student, I beg you to spare me the trouble of carrying this book back to the Boulevard. Yours, Mademoiselle, was the first intention. You saw the book before I saw it. You would have bought it on the spot, but had to go home for the money. In common equity, it is yours. In common civility, as student to student, I offer it to you. Say, is it yes or no?”

“Since you put it so simply and so generously, and since I believe you really wish me to accept your offer,” replies Mademoi-

selle Dufresnoy, taking out her purse, "I suppose I must say—yes."

And with this, she puts out her hand for the book, and offers me in return the sum of five and twenty francs.

Pained at having to accept the money, pained at being offered it, seeing no way of refusing it, and feeling altogether more distress than is reasonable in a man brought up to the taking of fees, I affect not to see the coin, and, bowing, move away in the direction of my own door.

"Pardon, Monsieur," she says, "but you forget that I am in your debt."

"And—and do you really insist"

She looks at me, half surprised and half offended.

"If you do not take the money, Monsieur, how can I take the book?"

Bowing, I receive the unwelcome francs in my unwilling palm.

Still she lingers.

"I—I have not thanked you as I ought for your generosity," she says, hesitatingly.

“Generosity !” I repeat, glancing with some bitterness at the five and twenty francs.

“True kindness, Monsieur, is neither bought nor sold,” says the lady, with the loveliest smile in the world, and closes her door.

CHAPTER VIII.

The Old, Old Story.

What thing is Love, which nought can countervail ?
Nought save itself—even such a thing is Love.

SIR W. RALEIGH.



MY acquaintance with Hortense Du-fresnoy progressed slowly as ever, and not even the Froissart incident went far towards promoting it. Absorbed in her studies, living for the intellect only, too self-contained to know the need for sympathy, she continued to be, at all events for me, the most inaccessible of God's creatures. And yet, despite her indifference, I loved her. Her pale, proud face haunted me ; her voice haunted me. I thought of her sometimes till it seemed impossible she

should not in some way be conscious of how my very soul was centred in her. But she knew nothing—guessed nothing—cared nothing; and the knowledge that I held no place in her life wrought in me at times till it became almost too bitter for endurance.

And this was love—real, passionate, earnest; the first and last love of my heart. Did I believe that I ever loved till now? Ah! no; for now only I felt the God in his strength, and beheld him in his beauty. Was I not blind till I had looked into her eyes and drunk of their light? Was I not deaf till I had heard the music of her voice? Had I ever truly lived, or breathed, or known delight till now?

I never stayed to ask myself how this would end, or whither it would lead me. The mere act of loving was too sweet for questioning. What cared I for the uncertainties of the future, having hope to live upon in the present? Was it not enough “to feed for aye my lamp and flames of love,” and worship her till that worship became a religion and a rite?

And now, longing to achieve something which should extort at least her admiration, if not her love, I wished I were a soldier, that I might win glory for her—or a poet, that I might write verses in her praise which should be deathless—or a painter, that I might spend years of my life in copying the dear perfection of her face. Ah! and I would so copy it that all the world should be in love with it. Not a wave of her brown hair that I would not patiently follow through all its windings. Not the tender tracery of a blue vein upon her temples that I would not lovingly render through its transparent veil of skin. Not a depth of her dark eyes that I would not study, “deep drinking of the infinite.” Alas! those eyes, so grave, so luminous, so stedfast:—

“Eyes not down-dropt, not over-bright, but fed
With the clear-pointed flame of chastity,”

—eyes wherein dwelt “thought folded over thought,” what painter need ever hope to copy them?

And still she never dreamed how dear she had grown to me. She never knew how

the very air seemed purer to me because she breathed it. She never guessed how I watched the light from her window night after night—how I listened to every murmur in her chamber—how I watched and waited for the merest glimpse of her as she passed by—how her lightest glance hurried the pulses through my heart—how her coldest word was garnered up in the treasure-house of my memory! What cared she, though to her I had dedicated all the “book and volume of my brain;” hallowed its every page with blazonings of her name; and illuminated it, for love of her, with fair images, and holy thoughts, and forms of saints and angels

“Innumerable, of stains and splendid dyes
As are the tiger-moth’s deep damask’d wings?”

Ah me! her hand was never yet outstretched to undo its golden clasps—her eye had never yet deigned to rest upon its records. To her I was nothing, or less than nothing—a fellow-student, a fellow-lodger, a stranger.

And yet I loved her “with a love that

was more than love"—with a love dearer than life and stronger than death—a love that, day after day, struck its roots deeper and farther into my very soul, never thence to be torn up here or hereafter.

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CHAPTER IX.

On a Winter's Evening.

AFTER a more than usually severe winter, the early spring came, crowned with rime instead of primroses. Paris was intensely cold. In March the Seine was still frozen, and snow lay thickly on the house-tops. Quiet at all times, the little nook in which I lived became monastically still, and at night, when the great gates were closed, and the footsteps of the passers-by fell noiselessly upon the trodden snow, you might have heard a whisper from one side of the street to the other. There was to me something indescribably delightful about this silent solitude in the heart of a great city.

Sitting beside the fire one evening, enjoy-

ing the profound calm of the place, attending from time to time to my little coffee-pot on the hob, and slowly turning the pages of a favourite author, I luxuriate in a state of mind half idle, half studious. Leaving off presently to listen to some sound which I hear, or fancy I hear, in the adjoining room, I wonder for the twentieth time whether Hortense has yet returned from her long day's teaching; and so rise—open my window—and look out. Yes; the light from her reading-lamp streams out at last across the snow-laden balcony. Heigho! it is something even to know that she is there so near me—divided only by a thin partition!

Trying to comfort myself with this thought, I close the window again and return to my book, more restless and absent than before. Sitting thus, with the unturned leaf lingering between my thumb and forefinger, I hear a rapid footfall on the stairs, and a musical whistle which, growing louder as it draws nearer, breaks off at my door, and is followed by a pro-

longed assault and battery of the outer panels.

“Welcome, noisiest of visitors!” I exclaim, knowing it to be Müller before I even open the door. “You are quite a stranger. You have not been near me for a fortnight.”

“It will not be your fault, Signor Bookworm, if I don’t become a stranger *au pied de la lettre*,” replies he, cheerily. “Why, man, it is close upon three weeks since you have crossed the threshold of my door. The Quartier Latin is aggrieved by your neglect, and the fine arts t’other side of the water languish and are forlorn.”

So saying, he shakes the snow from his coat like a St. Bernard mastiff, perches his cap on the head of the plaster Niobe that adorns my chimney-piece, and lays aside the folio which he had been carrying under his arm. I, in the meanwhile, have wheeled an easy-chair to the fire, brought out a bottle of Chambertin, and piled on more wood in honour of my guest.

“You can’t think,” said I, shaking hands

with him for the second time, "how glad I am that you have come round to-night."

"I quite believe it," replied he. "You must be bored to death, if these old busts are all the society you keep. *Sacré nom d'un pipe!* how can a fellow keep up his conviviality by the perpetual contemplation of Niobe and Jupiter Tonans? What do you mean by living such a life as this? Have you turned Trappist? Shall I head a subscription to present you with a skull and an hour-glass?"

"I'll have the skull made into a drinking-cup, if you do. Take some wine."

Müller filled his glass, tasted with the air of a connoisseur, and nodded approvingly.

"Chambertin, by the god Bacchus!" said he. "Napoleon's favourite wine, and mine—evidence of the sympathy that exists between the truly great."

And, draining the glass, he burst into a song in praise of French wines, beginning—

"Le Chambertin rend joyeux,
Le Nuits rend infatigable,
Le Volnay rend amoureux,
Le Champagne rend amiable.

Grisons-nous, mes chers amis,
L'ivresse
Vaut la richesse ;
Pour moi, dès que je suis gris,
Je possède tout Paris !”

“Oh hush !” said I, uneasily ; “not so loud, pray !”

“Why not ?”

“The—the neighbours, you know. We cannot do as we would in the Quartier Latin.”

“Nonsense, my dear fellow. You don’t swear yourself to silence when you take apartments in a *hôtel meublé* ! You might as well live in a penitentiary !—

‘De bouchons faisons un tas,
Et s’il faut avoir la goutte,
Au moins que ce ne soit pas
Pour n’avoir bu qu’une goutte !”

“Nay, I implore you !” I interposed again.
“The landlord . . .”

“Hang the landlord !

‘Grisons-nous——’”

“Well, but—but there is a lady in the next room . . .”

Müller laughed till the tears ran down his cheeks.

"*Allons donc !*" said he, "why not have told the truth at first? Oh, you sly rogue! You *gaillard*! This is your seclusion, is it? This is your love of learning—this the secret of your researches into science and art! What art, pray? Ovid's 'Art of Love,' I'll be sworn!"

"Laugh on, pray," I said, feeling my face and my temper growing hot; "but that lady, who is a stranger to me"

"Oh—oh—oh!" cried Müller.

"Who is a stranger to me," I repeated, "and who passes her evenings in study, must not be annoyed by noises in my room. Surely, my dear fellow, you know me well enough to understand whether I am in jest or in earnest."

Müller laid his hand upon my sleeve.

"Enough—enough," he said, smiling good-naturedly. "You are right, and I will be as dumb as Plato. What is the lady's name?"

"Dufresnoy," I answered, somewhat

reluctantly. "Mademoiselle Dufresnoy."

"Ay, but her Christian name?"

"Her Christian name," I faltered, more reluctant still. "I—I——"

"Don't say you don't know," said Müller, maliciously. "It isn't worth while. After all, what does it matter? Here's to her health, all the same—*à votre santé*, Mademoiselle Dufresnoy! What! not drink her health, though I have filled your glass on purpose?"

There was no help for it, so I took the glass and drank the toast with the best grace I could.

"And now, tell me," continued my companion, drawing nearer to the fire and settling himself with a confidential air that was peculiarly provoking, "what is she like? Young or old? Dark or fair? Plain or pretty?"

"Old," said I, desperately. "Old and ugly. Fifty at the least. Squints horribly."

Then, thinking that I had been a little too emphatic, I added:—

“But a very ladylike person, and exceedingly well-informed.”

Müller looked at me gravely, and filled his glass again.

“I think I know the lady,” said he.

“Indeed?”

“Yes—by your description. You forgot to add, however, that she is grey.”

“To be sure—as a badger.”

“To say nothing of a club foot, an impediment in her speech, a voice like a raven’s, and a hump like a dromedary’s! Ah! my dear friend, what an amazingly comic fellow you are!”

And the student burst again into a peal of laughter so hearty and infectious that I could not have helped joining in it to save my life.

“And now,” said he, when we had laughed ourselves out of breath, “now to the object of my visit. Do you remember asking me, months ago, to make you a copy of an old portrait that you had taken a fancy to in some tumble-down château near Montlhéry?”

“To be sure; and I have intended, over and over again, to remind you of it. Did you ever take the trouble to go over there and look at it?”

“Look at it, indeed! I should rather think so—and here is the proof. What does your connoisseurship say to it?”

Say to it! Good heavens! what could I say, what could I do, but flush up all suddenly with pleasure, and stare at it without power at first to utter a single word?

For it was like *her*—so like that it might have been her very portrait. The features were cast in the same mould—the brow, perhaps, was a little less lofty—the smile a little less cold; but the eyes, the beautiful, lustrous, soul-lighted eyes were the same—the very same!

If she were to wear an old-fashioned dress, and deck her fair neck and arms with pearls, and put powder on her hair, and stand just so, with her hand upon one of the old stone urns in the garden of that deserted château, she would seem to be standing for the portrait.

Well might I feel, when I first saw her, that the beauty of her face was not wholly unfamiliar to me! Well might I fancy I had seen her in some dream of long ago!

So this was the secret of it—and this picture was mine. Mine to hang before my desk when I was at work—mine to place at my bed's foot, where I might see it on first waking—mine to worship and adore, to weave fancies and build hopes upon, and “burn out the day in idle phantasies” of passionate devotion!

“Well,” said Müller impatiently, “what do you think of it?”

I looked up, like one dreaming.

“Think of it!” I repeated.

“Yes—do you think it like?”

“So like that it might be her por
I mean that it might be the original.”

“Oh, that's satisfactory. I was afraid you were disappointed.”

“I was only silent from surprise and pleasure.”

“Well, however faithful the copy may

be, you know, in these things one always misses the tone of age."

"I would not have it look a day older!" I exclaimed, never lifting my eyes from the canvas.

Müller came and looked down at it over my shoulder.

"It is an interesting head," said he. "I have a great mind to introduce it into my next year's competition picture."

I started as if he had struck me. The thought was sacrilege!

"For heaven's sake do no such thing!" I ejaculated.

"Why not?" said he, opening his eyes in astonishment.

"I cannot tell you why—at least not yet; but to—to confer a very particular obligation upon me, will you waive this point?"

Müller rubbed his head all over with both hands, and sat down in the utmost perplexity.

"Upon my soul and conscience," said he, "you are the most incomprehensible fellow I ever knew in my life!"

“I am. I grant it. What then? Let us see, I am to give you a hundred and fifty francs for this copy . . .”

“I won’t take it,” said Müller. “I mean you to accept it, as a pledge of friendship and good-will.”

“Nay, I insist on paying for it. I shall be proud to pay for it; but a hundred and fifty are not enough. Let me give you three hundred, and promise me that you will not put the head into your picture!”

Müller laughed, and shook his own head resolutely.

“I will give you both the portrait and the promise,” said he; “but I won’t take your money, if I know it.”

“But . . .”

“But I won’t—and so, if you don’t like me well enough to accept such a trifle from me, I’ll e’en carry the thing home again!”

And, snatching up his cap and cloak, he made a feint of putting the portrait back into the folio.

“Not for the world!” I exclaimed, taking possession of it without further remonstrance.

“I would sooner part from all I possess. How can I ever thank you enough?”

“By never thanking me at all! What little time the thing has cost me is overpaid, not only by the sight of your pleasure, but by my own satisfaction in copying it. To copy a good work is to have a lesson from the painter, though he were dead a hundred years before; and the man who painted that portrait, be he who he might, has taught me a trick or two that I never knew before. *Sapristi!* see if I don't dazzle you some day with an effect of white satin and pearls against a fair skin!”

“An ingenious argument; but it leaves me unconvinced, all the same. How! you are not going to run away already? Here's another bottle of Chambertin waiting to be opened; and it is yet quite early.”

“Impossible! I have promised to meet a couple of men up at the Prado, and have, besides, invited them afterwards to supper.”

“What is the Prado?”

“The Prado! Why, is it possible that I have never yet introduced you to the Prado?”

It's one of the jolliest places in all the Quartier Latin—it's close to the Palais de Justice. You can dance there, or practise pistol-shooting, or play billiards, or sup—or anything you please. Everybody smokes—ladies not excepted."

"How very delightful!"

"Oh, magnificent! Won't you come with me? I know a dozen pretty girls who will be delighted to be introduced to you."

"Not to-night, thank you," said I, laughing.

"Well, another time?"

"Yes, to be sure—another time."

"Well, good night."

"Good night, and thank you again, a thousand times over."

But he would not stay to hear me thank him, and was half way down the first flight before my sentence was finished. Just as I was going back into my room, and about to close the door, he called after me from the landing.

"*Holà, amigo!* When my picture is done,

I mean to give a bachelor's supper-party—chiefly students and *chicards*. Will you come?”

“Gladly.”

“Adieu, then. I will let you know in time.”

And with this, he broke out into a fragment of Beranger, gave a cheerful good night to Madame Bouïsse in the hall, and was gone.

And now to enjoy my picture. Now to lock the door, and trim the lamp, and place it up against a pile of books, and sit down before it in silent rapture, like a devotee before the portrait of his patron saint. Now I can gaze, unreprieved, into those eyes, and fancy they are hers. Now press my lips, unforbidden, upon that exquisite mouth, and believe it warm. Ah, will her eyes ever so give back the look of love in mine? Will her lips ever suffer mine to come so near? Would she, if she knew the treasure I possessed, be displeased that I so worshipped it?

Hanging over it thus, and suffering my

thoughts to stray on at their own will and pleasure, I am startled by the fall of some heavy object in the adjoining chamber. The fall is followed by a stifled cry, and then all is again silent.

To unlock my door and rush to hers—to try vainly to open it—to cry “Hortense! Hortense! what has happened? For Heaven’s sake, what has happened?” is the work of but an instant.

The antechamber lay between, and I remembered that she could not hear me. I ran back, knocked against the wall, and repeated:—

“What has happened? Tell me what has happened?”

Again I listened, and in that interval of suspense heard her garments rustle along the ground, then a deep sigh, and then the words:—

“Nothing serious. I have hurt my hand.”

“Can you open the door?”

There was another long silence.

“I cannot,” she said at length, but more faintly.

“In God’s name, try !”

No answer.

“Shall I get over the balcony ?”

I waited another instant, heard nothing, and then, without further hesitation, opened my own window and climbed the iron rail that separated her balcony from mine, leaving my footsteps trampled in the snow.

I found her sitting on the floor, with her body bent forward and her head resting against the corner of a fallen bookcase. The scattered volumes lay all about. A half-filled portmanteau stood close by on a chair. A travelling-cloak and a passport-case lay on the table.

Seeing, yet scarcely noting all this, I flung myself on my knees beside her, and found that one hand and arm lay imprisoned under the bookcase. She was not insensible, but pain had deprived her of the power of speech. I raised her head tenderly and supported it against a chair ; then lifted the heavy bookcase, and, one by one, removed the volumes that had fallen upon her.

Alas ! the white little hand all crushed

and bleeding—the powerless arm—the brave mouth striving to be firm !

I took the poor maimed arm, made a temporary sling for it with my cravat, and, taking her up in my arms as if she had been an infant, carried her to the sofa. Then I closed the window ; ran back to my own room for hot water ; tore up some old handkerchiefs for bandages ; and so dressed and bound her wounds—blessing (for the first time in my life) the destiny that had made me a surgeon.

“Are you in much pain?” I asked, when all was done.

“Not now—but I feel very faint.”

I remembered my coffee in the next room, and brought it to her. I lifted her head, and supported her with my arm while she drank it.

“You are much better now,” I said, when she had again lain down. “Tell me how it happened.”

She smiled languidly.

“It was not my fault,” she said, “but Froissart’s. Do you remember that Froissart ?”

Remember it ! I should think so.

“Froissart !” I exclaimed. “Why, what had he to do with it ?”

“Only this. I usually kept him on the top of the bookcase that fell down this evening. Just now, while preparing for a journey upon which I must start to-morrow morning, I thought to remove the book to a safer place ; and so, instead of standing on a chair, I tried to reach up, and, reaching up, disturbed the balance of the bookcase, and brought it down.”

“Could you not have got out of the way when you saw it falling ?”

“Yes—but I tried to prevent it, and so was knocked down and imprisoned as you found me.”

“Merciful heaven ! it might have killed you.”

“That was what flashed across my mind when I saw it coming,” she replied, with a faint smile.

“You spoke of a journey,” I said presently, turning my face away lest she should read its story too plainly ; “but now, of

course, you must not move for a few days."

"I must travel to-morrow," she said, with quiet decision.

"Impossible!"

"I have no alternative."

"But think of the danger—the imprudence—the suffering."

"Danger there cannot be," she replied, with a touch of impatience in her voice. "Imprudent it may possibly be; but of that I have no time to think. And as for the suffering, that concerns myself alone. There are mental pains harder to bear than the pains of the body, and the consciousness of a duty unfulfilled is one of the keenest of them. You urge in vain; I must go. And now, since it is time you bade me good night, let me thank you for your ready help and say good-bye."

"But may I do no more for you?"

"Nothing—unless you will have the goodness to bid Madame Bouïsse come upstairs, and finish packing my portmanteau for me."

"At what hour do you start?"

"At eight."

“May I not go with you to the station, and see that you get a comfortable seat?”

“Many thanks,” she replied, coldly; “but I do not go by rail, and my seat in the diligence is already taken.”

“You will want some one to see to your luggage—to carry your cloaks.”

“Madame Bouïsse has promised to go with me to the Messageries.”

Silenced, and perhaps a little hurt, I rose to take my leave.

“I wish you a safe journey, mademoiselle,” I said, “and a safe return.”

“And think me, at the same time, an ungrateful patient.”

“I did not say that.”

“No—but you thought so. After all, it is possible that I seem so. I am undemonstrative—unused to the amenities of life—in short, I am only half-civilized. Pray forgive me.”

“Mademoiselle,” I said, “your apology pains me. I have nothing to forgive. I will send Madame Bouïsse to you immediately.”

And with this I had almost left the room, but paused upon the threshold.

“Shall you be long away?” I asked, with assumed indifference.

“Shall I be long away?” she repeated dreamily. “How can I tell?” Then, correcting herself, “Oh, not long,” she added. “Not long. Perhaps a fortnight—perhaps a week.”

“Once more, then, good night.”

“Good night,” she answered absently; and I withdrew.

I then went down, sent Madame Bouïsse to wait upon her, and sat up anxiously listening more than half the night. Next morning at seven, I heard Madame Bouïsse go in again. I dared not even go to her door to inquire how she had slept, lest I should seem too persistent; but when they left the room and went downstairs together, I flew to my window.

I saw her cross the street in the grey morning. She walked feebly, and wore a large cloak, that hid the disabled arm and covered her to the feet. Madame Bouïsse

trotted beside her with a bundle of cloaks and umbrellas; a porter followed with her little portmanteau on his shoulder:

And so they passed under the archway across the trampled snow, and vanished out of sight.

CHAPTER X.

A Prescription.

WEEK went by—a fortnight went by—and still Hortense prolonged her mysterious absence. Where could she be gone? Was she ill? Had any accident befallen her on the road? What if the wounded hand had failed to heal? What if inflammation had set in, and she were lying, even now, sick and helpless, among strangers? These terrors came back upon me at every moment, and drove me almost to despair. In vain I interrogated Madame Bouïsse. The good-natured *concierge* knew no more than myself, and the little she had to tell only increased my uneasiness.

Hortense, it appeared, had taken two such journeys before, and had, on both occasions, started apparently at a moment's notice, and with every indication of anxiety and haste. From the first she returned after an interval of more than three weeks; from the second after about four or five days. Each absence had been followed by a long season of despondency and lassitude, during which, said the *concierge*, Mademoiselle scarcely spoke, or ate, or slept, but, silent and pale as a ghost, sat up later than ever with her books and papers. As for this last journey, all she knew about it was that Mam'selle had had her passport regulated for foreign parts the afternoon of the day before she started.

"But can you not remember in what direction the diligence was going?" I asked, again and again.

"No, M'sieur—not in the least."

"Nor the name of the town to which her place was taken?"

"I don't know that I ever heard it, M'sieur."

“But at least you must have seen the address on the portmanteau?”

“Not I, M’sieur—I never thought of looking at it.”

“Did she say nothing to account for the suddenness of her departure?”

“Nothing at all.”

“Nor about her return either, Madame Bouïsse? Just think a moment—surely she said something about when you might expect her back again?”

“Nothing, M’sieur, except, by the way—”

“Except what?”

“*Dame!* only this—as she was just going to step into the diligence, she turned back and shook hands with me—Mam’selle Hortense, proud as she is, is never above shaking hands with me, I can tell you, M’sieur.”

“No, no—I can well believe it. Pray go on!”

“Well, M’sieur, she shakes hands with me, and she says, ‘Thank you, good Madame Bouïsse, for all your kindness to me Hear that, M’sieur, ‘good Madame Bouïsse,’—the dear child!’”

“ And then—?”

“ Bah! how impatient you are! Well, then, she says (after thanking me, you observe)—‘ I have paid you my rent, Madame Bouïsse, up to the end of the present month, and if, when the time has expired, I have neither written nor returned, consider me still as your tenant. If, however, I do not come back at all, I will let you know further respecting the care of my books and other property.’ ”

If she did not come back at all! Oh, heaven! I had never contemplated such a possibility. I left Madame Bouïsse without another word, and going up to my own rooms, flung myself upon my bed, as if I were stupefied.

All that night, all the next day, those words haunted me. They seemed to have burned themselves into my brain in letters of fire. Dreaming, I woke up with them upon my lips; reading, they started out upon me from the page. “ If I never come back at all!”

At last, when the fifth day came round—

the fifth day of the third week of her absence—I became so languid and desponding that I lost all power of application.

Even Dr. Chéron noticed it, and calling me in the afternoon to his private room, said :—

“Basil Arbuthnot, you look ill. Are you working too hard?”

“I don’t think so, sir.”

“Humph ! Are you out much at night?”

“Out, sir?”

“Yes—don’t echo my words—do you go into society : frequent balls, theatres, and so forth?”

“I have not done so, sir, for several months past.”

“What is it, then ? Do you read late?”

“Really, sir, I hardly know—up to about one or two o’clock, on the average, I believe.”

“Let me feel your pulse.”

I put out my wrist, and he held it for some seconds, looking keenly at me all the time.

“Got anything on your mind?” he asked,

after he had dropped it again. "Want money, eh?"

"No, sir, thank you."

"Home-sick?"

"Not in the least."

"Hah! want amusement. Can't work perpetually—not reasonable to suppose it. There, *mon garçon*" (taking a folded paper from his pocket-book) "there's a prescription for you. Make the most of it."

It was a stall-ticket for the opera. Too restless and unhappy to reject any chance of relief, however temporary, I accepted it, and went.

I had not been to a theatre since that night with Josephine, nor to the Italian Opera since I used to go with Madame de Marignan. As I went in listlessly and took my place, the lights, the noise, the multitude of faces, confused and dazzled me. Presently the curtain rose, and the piece began. The opera was *I Capuletti*. I do not remember who the singers were; I am not sure that I ever knew. To me they were Romeo and Juliet, and I was a dweller

in Verona. The story, the music, the scenery, took a vivid hold upon my imagination. From the moment the curtain rose, I saw only the stage, and, except that I in some sort established a dim comparison between Romeo's sorrows and my own disquietude of mind, I seemed to lose all recollection of time and place, and almost of my own identity.

It seemed quite natural that that ill-fated pair of lovers should go through life, love, wed, and die singing. And why not? Are they not airy nothings, "born of romance, cradled in poetry, thinking other thoughts, and doing other deeds than ours?" As they live in poetry, so may they not with perfect fitness speak in song?

I went home in a dream, with the melodies ringing in my ears and the story lying heavy at my heart. I passed upstairs in the dark, went over to the window, and saw, oh joy! the light—the dear, familiar, welcome, blessed light, streaming forth, as of old, from Hortense's chamber window!

To thank heaven that she was safe was

my first impulse—to step out on the balcony, and watch the light as though it were a part of herself, was the second. I had not been there many moments when it was obscured by a passing shadow. The window opened, and she came out.

“Good evening,” she said, in her calm, clear voice. “I heard you out here, and thought you might like to know that, thanks to your treatment in the first instance, and such care as I have been able since to give it, my hand is once more in working order.”

“You are kind to come out and tell me so,” I said. “I had no hope of seeing you to-night. How long is it since you arrived?”

“About two hours,” she replied, carelessly.

“And you have been nearly three weeks away!”

“Have I?” said she, leaning her cheek upon her hand, and looking up dreamily into the night. “I did not count the days.”

“That proves you passed them happily,” I said; not without some secret bitterness.

"Happily!" she echoed. "What is happiness?"

"A word that we all translate differently," I replied.

"And your own reading of it?" she said, interrogatively.

I hesitated.

"Do you inquire what is my need, individually?" I asked, "or do you want my general definition?"

"The latter."

"I think, then, that the first requirement of happiness is work; the second, success."

She sighed.

"I accept your definition," she said, "and hope that you may realise it to the full in your own experience. For myself, I have toiled and failed—sought, and found not. Judge, then, how I came to leave the days uncounted."

The sadness of her attitude, the melancholy import of her words, the abstraction of her manner, filled me with a vague uneasiness.

"Failure is often the forerunner of suc-

cess," I replied, for want, perhaps, of something better to say.

She shook her head drearily, and stood looking up at the sky, where, every now and then, the moon shone out fitfully between the flying clouds.

"It is not the first time," she murmured, "nor will it be the last—and yet they say that God is merciful."

She had forgotten my presence. These words were not spoken to me, but in answer to her own thoughts. I said nothing, but watched her upturned face. It was pale as the wan moon overhead; thinner than before she went away; and sadder—oh, how much sadder!

She roused herself presently, and turning to me, said:—"I beg your pardon. I am very absent; but I am greatly fatigued. I have been travelling incessantly for two days and nights."

"Then I will wish you good night at once," I said.


"Good night," she replied; and went back into her room.

The next morning Dr. Chéron smiled one of his cold smiles, and said :—

“ You look better to-day, my young friend. I knew how it was with you—no worse malady, after all, than *ennui*. I shall take care to repeat the medicine from time to time.”

CHAPTER XI.

Under the Stars.

OPING, yet scarcely expecting to see her, I went out upon my balcony the next night at the same hour ; but, though the light of her lamp was bright within, no shadow obscured it, and no window opened. So, after waiting for more than an hour, I gave her up, and returned to my work. I did this for six nights in succession. On the seventh she came.

“You are fond of your balcony, fellow-student,” said she. “I often hear you out here.”

“My room gets heated,” I replied, “and my eyes weary, after several hours of hard

reading; and this keen, clear air puts new life into one's brains."

"Yes, it is delicious," said she, looking up into the night. "How dark the space of heaven is, and how bright are the stars! What a night for the Alps! What a night to be upon some Alpine height, watching the moon through a good telescope, and waiting for the sunrise!"

"Defer that wish for a few months," I replied smiling. "You would scarcely like Switzerland in her winter robes."

"Nay, I prefer Switzerland in winter," she said. "I passed through part of the Jura about ten days ago, and saw nothing but snow. It was magnificent—like a paradise of pure marble awaiting the souls of all the sculptors of all the ages."

"A fantastic idea," said I, "and spoken like an artist."

"Like an artist!" she repeated, musingly. "Well, are not all students artists?"

"Not those who study the exact sciences—not the student of law or divinity—nor he who, like myself, is a student of medicine.

He is the slave of Fact, and Art is the Eden of his banishment. His imagination is for ever captive. His horizon is for ever bounded. He is fettered by routine, and paralysed by tradition. His very ideas must put on the livery of his predecessors; for in a profession where originality of thought stands for the blackest shade of original sin, skill—mere skill—must be the end of his ambition.”

She looked at me, and the moonlight showed me that sad smile which her lips so often wore.

“You do not love your profession,” she said.

“I do not, indeed.”

“And yet you labour zealously to acquire it—how is that?”

“How is it with hundreds of others? My profession was chosen for me. I am not my own master.”

“But are you sure you would be happier in some other pursuit? Supposing, for instance, that you were free to begin again, what career do you think you would prefer?”

“I scarcely know, and I should scarcely care, so long as there was freedom of thought and speculation in it.”

“Geology, perhaps—or astronomy,” she suggested, laughingly.

“*Merci!* The bowels of the earth are too profound, and the heavens too lofty for me. I should choose some pursuit that would set the Ariel of the imagination free. That is to say, I could be very happy if my life were devoted to Science, but my soul echoes to the name of Art.”

“The artist creates—the man of science discovers,” said Hortense. “Beware lest you fancy you would prefer the work of creation only because you lack patience to pursue the work of discovery. Pardon me, if I suggest that you may, perhaps, be fitted for neither. Your sphere, I fancy, is reflection—comparison—criticism. You are not made for action, or work. Your taste is higher than your ambition, and you love learning better than fame. Am I right?”

“So right that I regret I can be read so easily.”

“ And therefore, it may be that you would find yourself no happier with Art than with Science. You might even fall into deeper discouragement; for in Science every onward step is at least certain gain, but in Art every step is groping, and success is only another form of effort. Art, in so far as it is more divine, is more unattainable, more evanescent, more unsubstantial. It needs as much patience as Science, and the passionate devotion of an entire life is as nothing in comparison with the magnitude of the work. Self-sacrifice, self-distrust infinite patience, infinite disappointment—such is the lot of the artist, such the law of aspiration.”

“ A melancholy creed.”

“ But a true one. The divine is doomed to suffering, and under the bays of the poet lurk ever the thorns of the self-immolator.”

“ But, amid all this record of his pains, do you render no account of his pleasures?” I asked. “ You forget that he has moments of enjoyment lofty as his aims, and deep as his devotion.”

“I do not forget it,” she said. “I know it but too well. Alas! is not the catalogue of his pleasures the more melancholy record of the two? Hopes which sharpen disappointment; visions which cheat while they enrapture; dreams that embitter his waking hours—fellow-student, do you envy him these?”

“I do; believing that he would not forego them for a life of common-place annoyances and placid pleasures.”

“Forego them! Never. Who that had once been the guest of the gods would forego the Divine for the Human? No—it is better to suffer than to stagnate. The artist and poet is over-paid in his brief snatches of joy. While they last, his soul sings ‘at heaven’s gate,’ and his forehead strikes the stars.”

She spoke with a rare and passionate enthusiasm, sometimes pacing to and fro; sometimes pausing with upturned face—

“A dauntless muse who eyes a dreadful fate!”

There was a long, long silence—she looking at the stars, I upon her face.

By-and-by she came over to where I stood, and leaned upon the railing that divided our separate territories.

“Friend,” said she, gravely, “be content. Art is the Sphinx, and to question her is destruction. Enjoy books, pictures, music, statues—rifle the world of beauty to satiety, if satiety be possible—but there pause. Drink the wine; seek not to crush the grape. Be happy, be useful, labour honestly upon the task that is thine, and be assured that the work will itself achieve its reward. Is it nothing to relieve pain—to prolong the days of the sickly—to restore health to the suffering—to soothe the last pangs of the dying? Is it nothing to be followed by the prayers and blessing of those whom you have restored to love, to fame, to the world’s service? To my thinking, the physician’s trade hath something god-like in it. Be content. Harvey’s discovery was as sublime as Newton’s, and it were hard to say which did God’s work best—Shakespeare or Jenner.”

“And you,” I said, the passion that I

could not conceal trembling in my voice ;
“and you—what are you, poet, or painter,
or musician, that you know and reason of
all these things?”

She laughed with a sudden change of mood, and shook her head.

“I am a woman,” said she. “Simply a woman—no more. One of the inferior sex ; and, as I told you long ago, only half civilized.”

“You are unlike every other woman !”

“Possibly, because I am more useless. Strange as it may seem, do you know I love Art better than sewing, or gossip, or dress ; and hold my liberty to be a dower more precious than either beauty or riches ? And yet—I am a woman !”

“The wisest, virtuousest, discreetest, best !”

“By no means. You are comparing me with Eve ; but I am not in the least like Eve, I assure you. She was an excellent housewife, and, if we may believe Milton, knew how to prepare ‘dulcet creams,’ and all sorts of Paradisaical dainties for her

husband's dinner. I, on the contrary, could not make a cream if Adam's life depended on it."

"*Eh bien!* of the theology of creams I know nothing. I only know that Eve was the first and fairest of her sex, and that you are as wise as you are beautiful."

"Nay, that is what Titania said to the ass," laughed Hortense. "Your compliments become equivocal, fellow-student. But hush! what hour is that?"

She stood with uplifted finger. The air was keen, and over the silence of the house-tops chimed the church-clocks—Two.

"It is late, and cold," said she, drawing her cloak more closely round her.

"Not later than you usually sit up," I replied. "Don't go yet.—'Tis now the very witching hour of night, when churchyards yawn——"

"I beg your pardon," she interrupted. "The churchyards have done yawning by this time, and, like other respectable citizens, are sound asleep. Let us follow their example. Good night."

“Good night,” I replied, reluctantly; but almost before I had said it, she was gone.

After this, as the winter wore away, and spring drew on, Hortense’s balcony became once more a garden, and she used to attend to her flowers every evening. She always found me on my balcony when she came out, and soon our open-air meetings became such an established fact that, instead of parting with “good night,” we said “*au revoir*—till to-morrow.” At these times we talked of many things; sometimes of subjects abstract and mystical—of futurity, of death, of the spiritual life—but oftenest of Art in its manifold developments. And sometimes our speculations wandered on into the late hours of the night.

And yet, for all our talking and all our community of tastes, we became not one jot more intimate. I still loved in silence—she still lived in a world apart.

CHAPTER XII.

Thermopylæ.

How dreary 'tis for women to sit still
On winter nights by solitary fires,
And hear the nations praising them far off.

AURORA LEIGH.



ABOLISHED by the National Convention of 1793, re-established in 1795, reformed by the first Napoleon in 1803, and re-modelled in 1816 on the restoration of the Bourbons, the Académie Française, despite its changes of fortune, name, and government, is a liberal and splendid institution. It consists of forty members, whose office it is to compile the great dictionary, and to enrich, purify, and preserve the language. It assists authors in distress. It awards prizes for poetry, elo-

quence, and virtue; and it bestows those honours with a noble impartiality that observes no distinction of sex, rank, or party. To fill one of the forty fauteuils of the Académie Française is the darling ambition of every eminent Frenchman of letters. There the poet, the philosopher, the historian, the man of science, sit side by side, and meet on equal ground. When a seat falls vacant, when a prize is to be awarded, when an anniversary is to be celebrated, the interest and excitement become intense. To the political, the fashionable, or the commercial world, these events are perhaps of little moment. They affect neither the Bourse nor the Budget. They exercise no perceptible influence on the Longchamps toilettes. But to the striving author, to the rising orator, to all earnest workers in the broad fields of literature, they are serious and significant circumstances.

Living out of society as I now did, I knew little and cared less for these academic crises. The success of one candidate was as unimportant to me as the failure of an-

other ; and I had more than once read the crowned poem or the prize essay without even glancing at the name of the fortunate author.

Now it happened that, pacing to and fro under the budding acacias of the Palais Royal garden one sunny spring-like morning, some three or four weeks after the conversation last recorded, I was pursued by a persecuting news-vendor with a hungry eye, mittened fingers, and a shrill voice, who persisted in reiterating close against my ear :—

“ News of the day, M’sieur !—news of the day ! Frightful murder in the Rue du Faubourg St. Antoine—state of the Bourse—latest despatches from the seat of war—prize poem crowned by the Académie Française—news of the day, M’sieur ! Only forty centimes ! News of the day ! ”

I refused, however, to be interested in any of these topics, turned a deaf ear to his allurements, and peremptorily dismissed him. I then continued my walk in solitary silence.

At the further extremity of the square, near the *Galerie Vitrée* and close beside the little newspaper kiosk, stood a large tree, since cut down, which at that time served as an advertising medium, and was daily decorated with a written placard, descriptive of the contents of the *Moniteur*, the *Presse*, and other leading papers. This placard was generally surrounded by a crowd of readers, and to-day the crowd of readers was more than usually dense.

I seldom cared in these days for what was going on in the busy outside world ; but this morning, my attention having been drawn to the subject, I amused myself, as I paced to and fro, by watching the eager faces of the little throng of idlers. Presently I fell in with the rest, and found myself conning the placard on the tree.

The name that met my astonished eyes on that placard was the name of Hortense Dufresnoy.

The sentence ran thus :—

“ Grand Biennial Prize for Poetry—Subject, *The Pass of Thermopylæ*—Successful

Candidate, *Mademoiselle Hortense Dufresnoy*."

Breathless, I read the passage twice; then, hearing at a little distance the shrill voice of the importunate news-vendor, I plunged after him and stopped him, just as he came to the—

"Frightful murder in the Rue du Faubourg Saint"

"Here," said I, tapping him on the shoulder; "give me one of your papers."

The man's eyes glittered.

"Only forty centimes, M'sieur," said he. "Tis the first I've sold to-day."

He looked poor and wretched. I dropped into his hand a coin that would have purchased all his little sheaf of journals, and hurried away, not to take the change or hear his thanks. He was silent for some moments; then took up his cry at the point where he had broken off, and started away with:—

—"Antoine!—state of the Bourse—latest despatches from the seat of war—news of the day—only forty centimes!"

I took my paper to a quiet bench near

the fountain, and read the whole account. There had been eighteen anonymous poems submitted to the Academy. Three out of the eighteen had come under discussion ; one out of the three had been warmly advocated by Béranger, one by Lebrun, and the third by some other academician. The poem selected by Béranger was at length chosen ; the sealed enclosure opened ; and the name of the successful competitor found to be Hortense Dufresnoy. To Hortense Dufresnoy, therefore, the prize and crown were awarded.

I read the article through, and then went home, hoping to be the first to congratulate her. Timidly, and with a fast-beating heart, I rang the bell at her outer door ; for we all had our bells at Madame Bouïsse's, and lived in our rooms as if they were little private houses.

She opened the door, and, seeing me, looked surprised ; for I had never before ventured to pay her a visit in her apartment.

"I have come to wish you joy," said I, not venturing to cross the threshold.

“To wish me joy!”

“You have not seen a morning paper?”

“A morning paper!”

And, echoing me thus, her colour changed, and a strange vague look—it might be of hope, it might be of fear—came into her face.

“There is something in the *Moniteur*,” I went on, smiling, “that concerns you nearly.”

“That concerns me?” she exclaimed. “*Me?* For heaven’s sake, speak plainly. I do not understand you. Has—has anything been discovered?”

“Yes—it has been discovered at the Académie Française that Mademoiselle Hortense Dufresnoy has written the best poem on Thermopylæ.”

She drew a deep breath, pressed her hands tightly together, and murmured:—

“Alas! is that all?”

“All! Nay—is it not enough to step at once into fame—to have been advocated by Béranger—to have the poem crowned in the Theatre of the Académie Française?”

She stood silent, with drooping head and

listless hands, all disappointment and despondency. Presently she looked up.

“Where did you learn this?” she asked.

I handed her the journal.

“Come in, fellow-student,” said she, and held the door wide for me to enter.

For the second time I found myself in her little *salon*, and found everything in the self-same order.

“Well,” I said, “are you not happy?”

She shook her head.

“Success is not happiness,” she replied, smiling mournfully. “That Béranger should have advocated my poem is an honour beyond price; but—but I need more than this to make me happy.”

And her eyes wandered, with a strange, yearning look, to the sword over the chimney-piece.

Seeing that look, my heart sank, and the tears sprang unbidden to my eyes. Whose was the sword? For whose sake was her life so lonely and secluded? For whom was she waiting? Surely here, if one could but read it aright, lay the secret

of her strange and sudden journeys—here I touched unawares upon the mystery of her life !

I did not speak. I shaded my face with my hand, and sat looking on the ground. Then, the silence remaining unbroken, I rose, and examined the drawings on the walls.

They were water-colours for the most part, and treated in a masterly but quite peculiar style. The skies were sombre, the foregrounds singularly elaborate, the colour stern and forcible. Angry sunsets barred by lines of purple cirrus stratus; sweeps of desolate heath bounded by jagged peaks ; steep mountain passes crimson with faded ferns and half-obsured by rain-clouds ; strange studies of weeds, and rivers, and lonely reaches of desolate sea-shore . . . these were some of the subjects, and all were evidently by the same hand.

“ Ah,” said Hortense, “ you are criticising my sketches !”

“ Your sketches !” I exclaimed. “ Are these your work ?”

“Certainly,” she replied, smiling. “Why not? What do you think of them?”

“What do I think of them! Well, I think that if you had not been a poet you ought to have been a painter. How fortunate you are in being able to express yourself so variously! Are these compositions, or studies from Nature?”

“All studies from Nature—mere records of fact. I do not presume to create—I am content humbly and from a distance to copy the changing moods of Nature.”

“Pray be your own catalogue, then, and tell me where these places are.”

“Willingly. This coast-line with the run of breaking surf was taken on the shores of Normandy, some few miles from Dieppe. This sunset is a recollection of a glorious evening near Frankfort, and those purple mountains in the distance are part of the Taunus range. Here is an old mediæval gateway at Solothurn, in Switzerland. This wild heath near the sea is in the neighbourhood of Biscay. This quaint knot of ruinous houses in a weed-grown Court was

sketched at Bruges. Do you see that milk-girl with her scarlet petticoat and Flemish *faillie*? She supplied us with milk, and her dairy was up that dark archway. She stood for me several times, when I wanted a foreground figure."

"You have travelled a great deal," I said. "Were you long in Belgium?"

"Yes; I lived there for some years. I was first pupil, then teacher, in a large school in Brussels. I was afterwards governess in a private family in Bruges. Of late, however, I have preferred to live in Paris, and give morning lessons. I have more liberty thus, and more leisure."

"And these two little quaint bronze figures?"

"Hans Sachs and Peter Vischer. I brought them from Nüremberg. Hans Sachs, you see, wears a furred robe, and presses a book to his breast. He does not look in the least like a cobbler. Peter Vischer, on the contrary, wears his leather apron and carries his mallet in his hand. Artist and iron-smith, he glories in his

trade, and looks as sturdy a little burgher as one would wish to see."

"And this statuette in green marble?"

"A copy of the celebrated 'Pensiero' of Michel Angelo—in other words, the famous sitting statue of Lorenzo de' Medici, in the Medicean chapel in Florence. I had it executed for me on the spot by Bazzanti."

"A noble figure!"

"Indeed it is—a noble figure, instinct with life, and strength, and meditation. My first thought on seeing the original was that I would not for worlds be condemned to pass a night alone with it. I should every moment expect the musing hand to drop away from the stern mouth, and the eyes to turn upon me!"

"These," said I, pausing at the chimney-piece, "are *souvenirs* of Switzerland. How delicately those chamois are carved out of the hard wood! They almost seem to snuff the mountain air! But here is a rapier with a hilt of ornamented steel—where did this come from?"

I had purposely led up the conversation to this point. I had patiently questioned and examined for the sake of this one inquiry, and I waited her reply as if my life hung on it.

Her whole countenance changed. She took it down, and her eyes filled with tears.

“It was my father’s,” she said, tenderly.

“Your father’s !” I exclaimed, joyfully. “Heaven be thanked ! Did you say your father’s ?”

She looked up surprised, then smiled, and faintly blushed.

“I did,” she replied.

“And was your father a soldier ?” I asked ; for the sword looked more like a sword of ceremony than a sword for service.

But to this question she gave no direct reply.

“It was his sword,” she said, “and he had the best of all rights to wear it.”

With this she kissed the weapon reverently, and restored it to its place.


I kissed her hand quite as reverently that day at parting, and she did not withdraw it.

CHAPTER XIII.

All About Art.

Art's a service.

AURORA LEIGH.

“OD sent art, and the devil sent critics,” said Müller, dismally paraphrasing a popular proverb.

“My picture is rejected!”

“Rejected!” I echoed, surprised to find him sitting on the floor, like a tailor, in front of an acre of canvas. “By whom?”

“By the Hanging Committee.”

“Hang the Hanging Committee!”

“A pious prayer, my friend. Would that it could be carried into execution!”

“What cause do they assign?”

“Cause! Do you suppose they trouble themselves to find one? Not a bit of it. They simply scrawl a great R in chalk on the back of it, and send you a printed notice to carry it home again. What is it to them, if a poor devil has been painting his very heart and hopes out, day after day, for a whole year, upon that piece of canvas? Nothing, and less than nothing—confound them!”

I drew a chair before the picture, and set myself to a patient study of the details. He had chosen a difficult subject; the death of Louis XI. The scene represented a spacious chamber in the Castle of Plessis-les-Tours. To the left, in a great oak chair beside the bed from which he had just risen, sat the dying king, with a rich, furred mantle loosely thrown around him. At his feet, his face buried in his hands, kneeled the Dauphin. Behind his chair, holding up the crucifix to enjoin silence, stood the king's confessor. A physician, a couple of councillors in scarlet robes, and a captain of archers, stood somewhat back, whispering to-

gether and watching the countenance of the dying man ; while through the outer door was seen a crowd of courtiers and pages, waiting to congratulate King Charles VIII. It was an ambitious subject, and Müller had conceived it in a grand spirit. The heads were expressive ; and the textures of the velvets, tapestries, oak carvings, and so forth, had been executed with more than ordinary finish and fidelity. For all this, however, there was more of promise than of achievement in the work. The lights were scattered ; the attitudes were stiff ; there was too evident an attempt at effect. One could see that it was the work of a young painter, who had yet much to learn, and something of the Academy to forget.

“ Well,” said Müller, still sitting ruefully on the floor, “ what do you think of it ? Am I rightly served ? Shall I send for a big pail of whitewash, and blot it all out ? ”

“ Not for the world ! ”

“ What shall I do, then ? ”

“ Do better. ”

“ But if I have done my best already ? ”

"Still do better; and when you have done that, do better again. So genius toils higher and ever higher, and like the climber of the glacier, plants his foot where only his hand clung the moment before."

"Humph! but what of my picture?"

"Well," I said, hesitatingly, "I am no critic——"

"Thank heaven!" muttered Müller, parenthetically.

"But there is something noble in the disposition of the figures. I should say, however, that you had set to work upon too large a scale."

"A question of focus," said the painter hastily. "A mere question of focus."

"How can that be, when you have finished some parts laboriously, and in others seem scarcely to have troubled yourself to cover the canvas?"

"I don't know. I'm impatient, you see, and—and I think I got tired of it towards the last."

"Would that have been the case if you had allowed yourself but half the space?"

"I'll take to enamel," exclaimed Müller, with a grin of hyperbolical despair. "I'll immortalise myself in miniature. I'll paint henceforward with the aid of a microscope, and never again look at nature unless through the wrong end of a telescope!"

"Pshaw!—be in earnest, man, and talk sensibly! Do you conceive that for every failure you are to change your style? Give yourself, heart and soul, to the school in which you have begun, and make up your mind to succeed."

"Do you believe, then, that a man may succeed by force of will alone?" said Müller, musingly.

"Yes, because force of will proceeds from force of character, and the two together, warp and woof, make the stuff out of which Nature clothes her heroes."

"Oh, but I am not talking of heroes," said Müller.

"By heroes I do not mean only soldiers. Captain Pen is as good a hero as Captain Sword, any day; and Captain Brush, to my thinking, is as fine a fellow as either."

“Ay; but do they come, as you would seem to imply, of the same stock?” said Müller. “Force of will and force of character are famous clays in which to mould a Wellington or a Columbus; but is not something more—at all events, something different—necessary to the modelling of a Raffaele?”

“I don’t fancy so. Power is the first requisite of genius. Give power in equal quantity to your Columbus and your Raffaele, and circumstance shall decide which will achieve the New World, and which the Transfiguration.”

“Circumstance!” cried the painter, impatiently. “Good heavens! do you make no account of the spontaneous tendencies of genius? Is Nature a mere vulgar cook, turning out men, like soups, from one common stock, with only a dash of flavouring here and there to give them variety? No—Nature is a subtle chemist, and her workshop, depend on it, is stored with delicate elixirs, volatile spirits, and precious fires of genius. Certain of these are kneaded with the clay

of the poet, others with the clay of the painter, the astronomer, the mathematician, the legislator, the soldier. Raffaele had in him some of 'the stuff that dreams are made of.' Never tell me that that same stuff, differently treated, would equally well have furnished forth an Archimedes or a Napoleon !"

"Men are what their age calls upon them to be," I replied, after a moment's consideration. "Be that demand what it may, the supply is ever equal to it. Centre of the most pompous and fascinating of religions, Rome demanded Madonnas and Transfigurations, and straightway Raffaele answered to the call. The Old World, overstocked with men, gold, and aristocracies, asked wider fields of enterprise, and Columbus added America to the map. What is this but circumstance? Had Italy needed colonies, would not her men of genius have turned sailors and discoverers? Had Madrid been the residence of the Popes, might not Columbus have painted altar-pieces or designed churches?"

Müller, still sitting on the floor, shook his head despondingly.

“I don’t think it,” he replied; “and I don’t wish to think it. It is too material a view of genius to satisfy my imagination. I love to believe that gifts are special. I love to believe that the poet is born a poet, and the artist an artist.”

“Hold! I believe that the poet is born a poet, and the artist an artist; but I also believe the poetry of the one and the art of the other to be only diverse manifestations of a power that is universal in its application. The artist whose lot in life it is to be a builder is none the less an artist. The poet, though engineer or soldier, is none the less a poet. There is the poetry of language, and there is also the poetry of action. So also there is the art which expresses itself by means of marble or canvas, and the art which designs a capitol, tapers a spire, or plants a pleasure-ground. Nay, is not this very interfusion of gifts, this universality of uses, in itself the bond of beauty which girdles the world like a cestus? If poetry were

only rhyme, and art only painting, to what an outer darkness of matter-of-fact should we be condemning nine-tenths of the creation !”

Müller yawned, as if he would have swallowed me and my argument together.

“ You are getting transcendental,” said he. “ I dare say your theories are all very fine and all very true ; but I confess that I don’t understand them. I never could find out all this poetry of bricks and mortar, railroads and cotton-factories, that people talk about so fluently now-a-days. We Germans take the dreamy side of life, and are seldom at home in the practical, be it ever so highly coloured and highly flavoured. In our parlance, an artist is an artist, and neither a bag-man nor an engine-driver.”

His professional pride was touched, and he said this with somewhat less than his usual *bonhomie*—almost with a shade of irritability.

“ Come,” said I, smiling, “ we will not discuss a topic which we can never see from the same point of view. Doing art is better

than talking art; and your business now is to find a fresh subject and prepare another canvas. Meanwhile cheer up, and forget all about Louis XI. and the Hanging Committee. What say you to dining with me at the Trois Frères? It will do you good."

"Good!" cried he, springing to his feet and shaking his fist at the picture. "More good, by Jupiter, than all the paint and me-gilp that ever was wasted! Not all the fine arts of Europe are worth a *poulet à la Marengo* and a bottle of old *Romanée*!"

So saying, he turned his picture to the wall, seized his cap, locked his door, scrawled outside with a piece of chalk,—

"Summoned to the Tuileries on state affairs,"

and followed me, whistling, down the six flights of gloomy, rickety, Quartier-Latin lodging-house stairs up which he lived and had his being.

CHAPTER XIV.

*I make myself acquainted with the Impolite
World and its Places of Unfashionable
Resort.*



MÜLLER and I dined merrily at the the Café of the Trois Frères Provençaux, discussed our coffee and cigars outside the Rotonde in the Palais Royal, and then started off in search of adventures. Striking up in a north-easterly direction through a labyrinth of narrow streets, we emerged at the Rue des Fontaines, just in front of that famous second-hand market cylept the Temple. It was Saturday night, and the business of the place was at its height. We went in, and turning aside from the broad thoroughfares which inter-

sect the market at right angles, plunged at once into a net-work of crowded side-alleys, noisy and populous as a cluster of beehives. Here were bargainings, haggling, quarrellings, elbowings, slang, low wit, laughter, abuse, cheating, and chattering enough to turn the head of a neophyte like myself. Müller, however, was in his element. He took me up one row and down another, pointed out all that was curious, had a nod for every grisette, and an answer for every touter, and enjoyed the Babel like one to the manner born.

“Buy, messieurs, buy! What will you buy?” was the question that assailed us on both sides, wherever we went.

“What do you sell, *mon ami*?” was Müller’s invariable reply.

“What do you want, m’sieur?”

“Twenty thousand francs per annum, and the prettiest wife in Paris,” says my friend; a reply which is sure to evoke something *spirituel*, after the manner of the locality.

“This is the most amusing place in Paris,”

observes he. "Like the Alsatia of old London, it has its own peculiar *argot*, and its own peculiar privileges. The activity of its commerce is amazing. If you buy a pocket-handkerchief at the first stall you come to, and leave it unprotected in your coat-pocket for five minutes, you may purchase it again at the other end of the alley before you leave. As for the resources of the market, they are inexhaustible. You may buy anything you please here, from a Court suit to a cargo of old rags. In this alley (which is the aristocratic quarter), are sold old jewelry, old china, old furniture, silks that have rustled at the Tuileries; fans that may have fluttered at the opera; gloves once fitted to tiny hands, and yet bearing a light soil where the rings were worn beneath; laces that may have been the property of Countesses or Cardinals; masquerade suits, epaulets, uniforms, furs, perfumes, artificial flowers, and all sorts of elegant superfluities, most of which have descended to the merchants of the Temple through the hands of ladies-maids and valets. Yonder lies the district

called the "Forêt Noire"—a land of unpleasant atmosphere inhabited by cobblers and clothes-menders. Down to the left you see nothing but rag and bottle-shops, old iron stores, and lumber of every kind. Here you find chiefly household articles, bedding, upholstery, crockery, and so forth."

"What will you buy, messieurs?" continued to be the cry, as we moved along arm-in-arm, elbowing our way through the crowd, and exploring this singular scene in all directions.

"What will you buy, messieurs?" shouts one salesman. "A carpet? A capital carpet, neither too large nor too small. Just the size you want!"

"A hat, m'sieur, better than new," cries another; "just aired by the last owner."

"A coat that will fit you better than if it had been made for you?"

"A pair of boots? Dress-boots, dancing-boots, walking-boots, morning-boots, evening-boots, riding-boots, fishing-boots, hunting-boots. All sorts, m'sieur—all sorts!"

"A cloak, m'sieur?"

“A lace shawl to take home to Madame?”

“An umbrella, m’sieur?”

“A reading lamp?”

“A warming pan?”

“A pair of gloves?”

“A shower-bath?”

“A hand-organ?”

“What! m’sieurs, do you buy nothing this evening? Holà, Antoine! monsieur keeps his hands in his pockets, for fear his money should fall out!”

“Bah! They’ve not a centime between them!”

“Go down the next turning and have the hole in your coat mended!”

“Make way there for monsieur the millionaire!”

“They are ambassadors on their way to the Court of Persia.”

“*Ohe! Panè! panè! panè!*”

Thus we run the gauntlet of all the tongues in the Temple, sometimes retorting, sometimes laughing and passing on, sometimes stopping to watch the issue of a dispute or the clinching of a bargain.

“*Dame*, now ! if it were only ten francs cheaper,” says a voice that strikes my ear with a sudden sense of familiarity. Turning, I discover that the voice belongs to a young woman close at my elbow, and that the remark is addressed to a good-looking workman upon whose arm she is leaning.

“What, Josephine !” I exclaim.

“*Comment !* Monsieur Basil !”

And I find myself kissed on both cheeks before I even guess what is going to happen to me.

“Have I not also the honour of being remembered by Mademoiselle ?” says Müller, taking off his hat with all the politeness possible ; whereupon Josephine, in an ecstasy of recognition, embraces him likewise.

“*Mais, quel bonheur !*” cries she. “And to meet in the Temple, above all places ! Emile, you heard me speak of Monsieur Basil—the gentleman who gave me that lovely shawl that I wore last Sunday to the Château des Fleurs—*eh bien !* this is he—and here is Monsieur Müller, his friend. Gentlemen, this is Emile, my *fiancé*. We

are to be married next Friday week, and we are buying our furniture."

The good-looking workman pulled off his cap and made his bow, and we proffered the customary congratulations.

"We have bought such sweet, pretty things," continued she, rattling on with all her old volubility, "and we have hired the dearest little *appartement* on the fourth story, in a street near the Jardin des Plantes. See—this looking-glass is ours; we have just bought it. And those maple chairs, and that chest of drawers with the marble top. It isn't real marble, you know; but it's ever so much better than real:—not nearly so heavy, and so beautifully carved that it's quite a work of art. Then we have bought a carpet—the sweetest carpet! Is it not, Emile?"

Emile smiled, and confessed that the carpet was "*fort bien*."

"And the time-piece, Madame?" suggested the furniture-dealer, at whose door we were standing. "Madame should really not refuse herself the time-piece."

Josephine shook her head.

"It is too dear," said she.

"Pardon, madame. I am giving it away;—absolutely giving it away at the price!"

Josephine looked at it wistfully, and weighed her little purse. It was a very little purse, and very light.

"It is so pretty!" said she.

The clock was of ormolu upon a painted stand, and was surmounted by a stout little gilt Cupid in a triumphal chariot, drawn by a pair of hard-working doves.

"What is the price of it?" I asked.

"Thirty-five francs, m'sieur," replied the dealer, briskly.

"Say twenty-five," urged Josephine.

The dealer shook his head.

"What if we did without the looking-glass?" whispered Josephine to her *fiancé*.

"After all, you know, one can live without a looking-glass; but how shall I have your dinners ready, if I don't know what o'clock it is?"

"I don't really see how we are to do without a clock," admitted Emile.

“And that darling little Cupid!”

Emile conceded that the Cupid was irresistible.

“Then we decide to have the clock, and do without the looking-glass?”

“Yes, we decide.”

In the meantime I had slipped the thirty-five francs into the dealer's hand.

“You must do me the favour to accept the clock as a wedding-present, Mademoiselle Josephine,” I said. “And I hope you will favour me with an invitation to the wedding.”

“And me also,” said Müller; “and I shall hope to be allowed to offer a little sketch to adorn the walls of your new home.”

Their delight and gratitude were almost too great. We shook hands again all round. I am not sure, indeed, that Josephine did not then and there embrace us both for the second time.

“And you will both come to our wedding!” cried she. “And we will spend the day at St. Cloud, and have a dance in the evening; and we will invite Monsieur Gus-

tave, and Monsieur Jules, and Monsieur Adrien. Oh, dear! how delightful it will be!"

"And you promise me the first quadrille?" said I.

"And me the second?" added Müller.

"Yes, yes—as many as you please."

"Then you must let us know at what time to come, and all about it; so, till Friday week, adieu!"

And thus, with more shaking of hands, and thanks, and good wishes, we parted company, leaving them still occupied with the gilt Cupid and the furniture-broker.

After the dense atmosphere of the clothes-market, it is a relief to emerge upon the Boulevard du Temple—the noisy, feverish, crowded Boulevard du Temple, with its half dozen theatres, its glare of gas, its cake-sellers, bill-sellers, lemonade-sellers, cabs, cafés, gendarmes, tumblers, grisettes, and pleasure-seekers of both sexes.

Here we pause awhile to applaud the performances of a company of dancing-dogs, whence we are presently drawn away by the

sight of a gentleman in a *moyen-age* costume, who is swallowing penknives and bringing them out at his ears, to the immense gratification of a large circle of bystanders.

A little farther on lies the Jardin Turc; and here we drop in for half an hour, to restore ourselves with coffee-ices, and look on at the dancers. This done, we presently issue forth again, still in search of amusement.

"Have you ever been to the Petit Lazary?" asks my friend, as we stand at the gate of the Jardin Turc, hesitating which way to turn.

"Never; what is it?"

"The most inexpensive of theatrical luxuries—an evening's entertainment of the mildest intellectual calibre, and at the lowest possible cost. Here we are at the doors. Come in, and complete your experience of Paris life!"

The Petit Lazary occupies the lowest round of the theatrical ladder. We pay something like sixpence halfpenny or sevenpence apiece, and are inducted into the

dress-circle. Our appearance is greeted with a round of applause. The curtain has just fallen, and the audience have nothing better to do. Müller lays his hand upon his heart, and bows profoundly, first to the gallery and next to the pit; whereupon they laugh, and leave us in peace. Had we looked dignified or indignant we should probably have been hissed till the curtain rose.

It is an audience in shirt-sleeves, consisting for the most part of workmen, maid-servants, soldiers, and street-urchins, with a plentiful sprinkling of pick-pockets—the latter in a strictly private capacity, being present for entertainment only, without any ulterior professional views.

It is a noisy *entr'acte* enough. Three vaudevilles have already been played, and while the fourth is in preparation the public amuses itself according to its own riotous will and pleasure. Nuts and apple-parings fly hither and thither; oranges describe perilous parabolas between the pit and the gallery; adventurous *gamins* make daring

excursions round the upper rails ; dialogues maintained across the house, and quarrels supported by means of an incredible copiousness of invective, mingle in discordant chorus with all sorts of howlings, groanings, whistlings, crowings, and yelpings, above which, in shrillest treble, rise the voices of cake and apple-sellers, and the piercing cry of the hump-back who distributes “vaudevilles at five centimes apiece.” In the meantime, almost distracted by the patronage that assails him in every direction, the lemonade-vendor strides hither and thither, supplying floods of nectar at two centimes the glass ; while the audience, skilled in the combination of enjoyments, eats, drinks, and vociferates to its heart’s content. Fabulous meats, and pies of mysterious origin, are brought out from baskets and hats. Pocket-handkerchiefs spread upon benches do duty as table-cloths. Clasp-knives, galette, and sucre d’orge pass from hand to hand—nay, from mouth to mouth—and, in the midst of the tumult, the curtain rises.

All is, in one moment, profoundly silent.

The viands disappear; the lemonade-seller vanishes; the boys outside the gallery-rails clamber back to their places. The drama, in the eyes of the Parisians, is almost a sacred rite, and not even the noisiest *gamin* would raise his voice above a whisper when the curtain is up.

The vaudeville that follows is, to say the least of it, a perplexing performance. It has no plot in particular. The scene is laid in a lodging-house, and the discomforts of one Monsieur Chouffleur, an elderly gentleman in a flowered dressing-gown and a gigantic nightcap, furnish forth all the humour of the piece. What Monsieur Chouffleur has done to deserve his discomforts, and why a certain student named Charles should devote all the powers of his mind to the devising and inflicting of those discomforts, is a mystery which we, the audience, are never permitted to penetrate. Enough that Charles, being a youth of mischievous tastes and extensive wardrobe, assumes a series of disguises for the express purpose of tormenting Monsieur Chouffleur, and is unaccountably rewarded in the end

with the hand of Monsieur Chouffleur's daughter ; a consummation which brings down the curtain amid loud applause, and affords entire satisfaction to everybody.

It is by this time close upon midnight, and, leaving the theatre with the rest of the audience, we find a light rain falling. The noisy thoroughfare is hushed to comparative quiet. The carriages that roll by are homeward bound. The waiters yawn at the doors of the cafés and survey pedestrians with a threatening aspect. The theatres are closing fast, and a row of flickering gas-lamps in front of a faded transparency which proclaims that the juvenile *Tableaux Vivants* are to be seen within, denotes the only place of public amusement yet open to the curious along the whole length of the Boulevard du Temple.

“ And now, *amigo*, where shall we go ? ” says Müller. “ Are you for a billiard-room or a lobster supper ? Or shall we beat up the quarters of some of the fellows in the Quartier Latin, and see what fun is afoot on the other side of the water ? ”

“ Whichever you please. You are my guest to-night, and I am at your disposal.”

“ Or what say you to dropping in for an hour among the Chicards?”

“ A capital idea—especially if you again entertain the society with a true story of events that never happened.”

“ *Allons donc !—*

‘ C’était de mon temps.
Que brillait Madame Grégoire.
J’allais à vingt ans
Dans sons cabaret rire et boire.’

—confound this drizzle! It soaks one through and through, like a sponge. If you are no fonder of getting wet through than I am, I vote we both run for it!”

With this he set off running at full speed, and I followed.

The rain soon fell faster and thicker. We had no umbrellas; and being by this time in a region of back-streets, an empty fiacre was a prize not to be hoped for. Coming presently to a dark archway, we took shelter and waited till the shower should

pass over. It lasted longer than we had expected, and threatened to settle into a night's steady rain. Müller kept his blood warm by practising extravagant quadrille steps and singing scraps of Béranger's ballads; whilst I, watching impatiently for a cab, kept peering up and down the street, and listening to every sound.


Presently a quick footfall echoed along the wet pavement, and the figure of a man, dimly seen by the blurred light of the street-lamps, came hurrying along the other side of the way. Something in the firm free step, in the upright carriage, in the height and build of the passer-by, arrested my attention. He drew nearer. He passed under the lamp just opposite, and, as he passed, flung away the end of his cigar, which fell, hissing, into the little rain-torrent running down the middle of the street. He carried no umbrella; but his hat was pulled low, and his collar drawn up, and I could see nothing of his face. But the gesture was enough.

For a moment I stood still and looked

after him; then, calling to Müller that I should be back presently, I darted off in pursuit.

CHAPTER XV.

The King of Diamonds.

HE rain beat in my face and almost blinded me ; the wind hustled me ; the gendarme at the corner of the street looked at me suspiciously ; and still I followed, and still the tall stranger strode on ahead. Up one street he led me and down another, across a market-place, through an arcade, past the Bourse, and into that labyrinth of small streets that lies behind the Italian Opera-house, and is bounded on the East by the Rue de Richelieu, and on the West by the Rue Louis le Grand. Here he slackened his pace, and I found myself gaining upon him for the first time. Presently he came to a dead stop,

and as I continued to draw nearer, I saw him take out his watch and look at it by the light of a street-lamp. This done, he began sauntering slowly backwards and forwards, as if waiting for some second person.

For a moment I also paused, hesitating. What should I do?—pass him under the lamp, and try to see his face? Go boldly up to him, and invent some pretence to address him, or wait in this angle of deep shade, and see what would happen next? I was deceived, of course—deceived by a merely accidental resemblance. Well, then, I should have had my run for my pains, and have taken cold, most likely, into the bargain. At all events, I would speak to him.

Seeing me emerge from the darkness and cross over towards the spot where he was standing, he drew aside with the air of a man upon his guard, and put his hand quickly into his breast.

“I beg your pardon, monsieur,” I began.

“What! my dear Damon!—is it you?” he interrupted, and held out both his hands.

I grasped them joyously.

“Dalrymple, is it you?”

“Myself, Damon—*faute de mieux*.”

“And I have been running after you for the last two miles! What brings you to Paris? Why did you not let me know you were here? How long have you been back? Has anything gone wrong? Are you well?”

“One question at a time, my Arcadian, for mercy’s sake!” said he. “Which am I to answer?”

“The last.”

“Oh, I am well—well enough. But let us walk on a little farther while we talk.”

“Are you waiting for anyone?” I asked, seeing him look round uneasily.

“Yes—no—that is, I expect to see some one come past here presently. Step into this doorway, and I will tell you all about it.”

His manner was restless, and his hand, as it pressed mine, felt hot and feverish.

“I am sure you are not well,” I said, following him into the gloom of a deep, old-fashioned doorway.

“Am I not? Well, I don’t know—perhaps I am not. My blood burns in my veins to-night like fire. Nay, thou wilt learn nothing from my pulse, thou sucking Æsculapius! Mine is a sickness not to be cured with drugs. I must let blood for it.”

The short, hard laugh with which he said this troubled me still more.

“Speak out,” I said—“for heaven’s sake, speak out! You have something on your mind—what is it?”

“I have something on my hands,” he replied, gloomily. “Work. Work that must be done quickly, or there will be no peace for any of us. Look here, Damon—if you had a wife, and another man stood before the world as her betrothed husband—if you had a wife, and another man spoke of her as his—boasted of her—behaved in the house as if it were already his own—treated her servants as though he were their master—possessed himself of her papers—extorted money from her—brought his friends, on one pretext or another, about her house—tormented her, day after day,

to marry him . . . what would you do to such a man as this?"

"Make my own marriage public at once, and set him at defiance," I replied.

"Ay, but . . ."

"But what?"

"That alone will not content me. I must punish him with my own hand."

"He would be punished enough in the loss of the lady and her fortune."

"Not he! He has entangled her affairs sufficiently by this time to indemnify himself for her fortune, depend on it. And as for herself—pshaw! he does not know what love is!"

"But his pride——"

"But *my* pride!" interrupted Dalrymple, passionately. "What of my pride?—my wounded honour?—my outraged love? No, no, I tell you, it is not such a paltry vengeance that will satisfy me! Would to heaven I had trusted only my own arm from the first! Would to heaven that, instead of having anything to say to the cursed brood of the law, I had taken the viper by the

throat, and brought him to my own terms after my own fashion!"

"But you have not yet told me what you are doing here?"

"I am waiting to see Monsieur de Simoncourt."

"Monsieur de Simoncourt!"

"Yes. That white house at the corner is one of his haunts,—a private gaming-house, never open till after midnight. I want to meet him accidentally, as he is going in."

"What for?"

"That he may take me with him. You can't get into one of these places without an introduction, you know. Those who keep them are too much afraid of the police."

"But do you play?"

"Come with me, and see. Hark! do you hear nothing?"

"Yes, I hear a footstep. And here comes a man."

"Let us walk to meet him, accidentally, and seem to be talking."

I took Dalrymple's arm, and we strolled

in the direction of the new comer. It was not De Simoncourt, however, but a tall man with a grizzled beard, who crossed over, apprehensively, at our approach, but recrossed and went into the white house at the corner as soon as he thought us out of sight.

“One of the gang,” said Dalrymple, with a shrug of his broad shoulders. “We had better go back to our doorway, and wait till the right man comes.”

We had not long to wait. The next arrival was he whom we sought. We strolled on, as before, and came upon him, face to face.

“De Simoncourt, by all that’s propitious!” cried Dalrymple.

“What—Major Dalrymple returned to Paris!”

“Ay, just returned. Bored to death with Berlin and Vienna—no place like Paris, De Simoncourt, go where one will!”

“None, indeed. There is but one Paris, and pleasure is the true profit of all who visit it.”

“My dear De Simoncourt, I am appalled to

hear you perpetrate a pun ! By the way, you have met Mr. Basil Arbuthnot at my rooms ?”

M. de Simoncourt lifted his hat, and was graciously pleased to remember the circumstance.

“And now,” pursued Dalrymple, “having met, what shall we do next ? Have you any engagement for the small hours, De Simoncourt ?”

“I am quite at your disposal. Where were you bound for ?”

“Anywhere—everywhere. I want excitement.”

“Would a hand at *écarté*, or a green table, have any attraction for you ?” suggested De Simoncourt, falling into the trap as readily as one could have desired.

“The very thing, if you know where they are to be found !”

“Nay, I need not take you far to find both. There is in this very street a house where money may be lost and won as easily as at the Bourse. Follow me.”

He took us to the white house at the

corner, and, pressing a spring concealed in the wood-work of the lintel, rung a bell of shrill and peculiar *timbre*. The door opened immediately, and, after we had passed in, closed behind us without any visible agency. Still following at the heels of M. de Simoncourt, we then went up a spacious staircase dimly lighted, and, leaving our hats in an ante-room, entered unannounced into an elegant *salon*, where some twenty or thirty *habitués* of both sexes had already commenced the business of the evening. The ladies, of whom there were not more than half-a-dozen, were all more or less painted, *passées*, and showily dressed. Among the men were military stocks, ribbons, crosses, stars, and fine titles in abundance. We were evidently supposed to be in very brilliant society—brilliant, however, with a fictitious lustre that betrayed the tinsel beneath, and reminded one of a fashionable reception on the boards of the Haymarket or the Porte St. Martin. The mistress of the house, an abundant and somewhat elderly Juno in green velvet, with a profusion of jewelry on

her arms and bosom, came forward to receive us.

“Madame de Sainte Amaranthe, permit me to present my friends, Major Dalrymple and Mr. Arbuthnot,” said De Simoncourt, imprinting a gallant kiss on the plump hand of the hostess.

Madame de Ste. Amaranthe professed herself charmed to receive any friends of M. de Simoncourt; whereupon M. de Simoncourt’s friends were enchanted to be admitted to the privilege of Madame de Ste. Amaranthe’s acquaintance. Madame de Ste. Amaranthe then informed us that she was the widow of a general officer who fell at Austerlitz, and the daughter of a rich West Indian planter whom she called her *père adoré*, and to whose supposititious memory she wiped away an imaginary tear with an embroidered pocket-handkerchief. She then begged that we would make ourselves at home, and, gliding away, whispered something in De Simoncourt’s ear, to which he replied by a nod of intelligence.

“That harpy hopes to fleece us,” said

Dalrymple, slipping his arm through mine and drawing me towards the roulette table. "She has just told De Simoncourt to take us in hand. I always suspected the fellow was a Greek."

"A Greek?"

"Ay, in the figurative sense—a gentleman who lives by dexterity at cards."

"And shall you play?"

"By-and-by. Not yet, because——"

He checked himself, and looked anxiously round the room.

"Because what?"

"Tell me, Arbuthnot," said he, paying no attention to my question, "do *you* mind playing?"

"I? My dear fellow, I hardly know one card from another."

"But have you any objection?"

"None whatever to the game; but a good deal to the penalty. I don't mind confessing to you that I ran into debt some months back, and that"

"Nonsense, boy!" interrupted Dalrymple, with a kindly smile. "Do you suppose

I want you to gamble away your money? No, no—the fact is that I am here for a purpose, and it will not do to let my purpose be suspected. These Greeks want a pigeon. Will you oblige me by being that pigeon, and by allowing me to pay for your plucking?”

I still hesitated.

“But you will be helping me,” urged he. “If you don’t sit down, I must.”

“You would not lose so much,” I expostulated.

“Perhaps not, if I were cool and kept my eyes open; but to-night I am *distract*, and should be as defenceless as yourself.”

“In that case I will play for you with pleasure.”

He slipped a little pocket-book into my hand.

“Never stake more than five francs at a time,” said he, “and you cannot ruin me. The book contains a thousand. You shall have more, if necessary; but I think that sum will last as long as I shall want you to keep playing.”

“A thousand francs!” I exclaimed.
“Why, that is forty pounds!”

“If it were four hundred, and it answered my purpose,” said Dalrymple between his teeth, “I should hold it money well spent!”

At this moment De Simoncourt came up, and apologised for having left us so long.

“If you want mere amusement, Major Dalrymple,” said he, “I suppose you will prefer *roulette* to *écarté*?”

“I will stake a few pieces presently on the green cloth,” replied Dalrymple, carelessly; “but, first of all, I want to initiate my young friend here. As to double *écarté*, Monsieur de Simoncourt, I need hardly tell you, as a man of the world, that I never play it with strangers.”

De Simoncourt smiled, and shrugged his shoulders.

“Quite right,” said he. “I believe that here everything is really *de bonne foi*; but where there are cards there will always be danger. For my part, I always shuffle the pack after my adversary!”

With this he strolled off again, and I took a vacant chair at the long table, next to a lady, who made way for me with the most gracious smile imaginable. Only the players sat; so Dalrymple stood behind me and looked on. It was a green board, somewhat larger than an ordinary billiard-table, with mysterious boundaries traced here and there in yellow and red, and a cabalistic table of figures towards each end. A couple of well-dressed men sat in the centre; one to deal out the cards, and the other to pay and receive the money. The one who had the management of the cash wore a superb diamond ring, and a red and green ribbon at his button-hole. Dalrymple informed me in a whisper that this noble seigneur was Madame de Ste. Amaranthe's brother.

As for the players, they all looked serious and polite enough, as ladies and gentlemen should, at their amusement. Some had pieces of card, which they pricked occasionally with a pin, according to the progress of the game. Some had little piles of silver,

or sealed *rouleaux*, lying beside them. As for myself, I took out Dalrymple's pocket-book, and laid it beside me, as if I were an experienced player and meant to break the bank. For a few minutes he stood by, and then, having given me some idea of the leading principles of the game, wandered away to observe the other players.

Left to myself, I played on—timidly at first; soon with more confidence; and, of course, with the novice's invariable good-fortune. My amiable neighbour drew me presently into conversation. She had a theory of chances relating to averages of colour, and based upon a bewildering calculation of all the black and red cards in the pack, which she was so kind as to explain to me. I could not understand a word of it, but politeness compelled me to listen. Politeness also compelled me to follow her advice when she was so obliging as to offer it, and I lost, as a matter of course. From this moment my good-luck deserted me.

“Courage, Monsieur,” said my amiable neighbour; “you have only to play

long enough, and you are sure to win."

In the meantime, I kept following Dalrymple with my eyes, for there was something in his manner that filled me with vague uneasiness. Sometimes he drew near the table and threw down a Napoleon, but without heeding the game, or caring whether he won or lost. He was always looking to the door, or wandering restlessly from table to table. Watching him thus, I thought how haggard he looked, and what deep channels were furrowed in his brow since that day when we lay together on the autumnal grass under the trees in the forest of St. Germain.

Thus a long time went by, and I found by my watch that it was nearly four o'clock in the morning—also that I had lost six hundred francs out of the thousand. It seemed incredible. I could hardly believe that the time and the money had flown so fast. I rose in my seat and looked round for Dalrymple; but in vain. Could he be gone, leaving me here? Impossible! Apprehensive of I knew not what, I pushed

back my chair, and left the table. The rooms were now much fuller—more stars and moustachios; more velvets and laces, and Paris diamonds. Fresh tables, too, had been opened for *lansquenet*, *baccarat*, and *écarté*. At one of these I saw M. de Simoncourt. When he laid down his cards for the deal, I seized the opportunity to inquire for my friend.

He pointed to a small inner room divided by a rich hanging from the farther end of the *salon*.

“You will find Major Dalrymple in Madame de Ste. Amaranthe’s boudoir, playing with M. le Vicomte de Caylus,” said he, courteously, and resumed his game.

Playing with De Caylus! Sitting down amicably with De Caylus! I could not understand it.

Crowded as the rooms now were, it took me some time to thread my way across, and longer still, when I had done so, to pass the threshold of the boudoir, and obtain sight of the players. The room was very small, and filled with lookers-on. At a table

under a chandelier sat De Caylus and Dalrymple. I could not see Dalrymple's face, for his back was turned towards me; but the Vicomte I recognised at once—pale, slight, refined, with the old look of dissipation and irritability, and the same restlessness of eye and hand that I had observed on first seeing him. They were evidently playing high, and each had a pile of notes and gold lying at his left hand. De Caylus kept nervously crumbling a note in his fingers. Dalrymple sat motionless as a man of bronze, and, except to throw down a card when it came to his turn, never stirred a finger. There was, to my thinking, something ominous in his exceeding calmness.

“At what game are they playing?” I asked a gentleman near whom I was standing.

“At *écarté*,” replied he, without removing his eyes from the players.

Knowing nothing of the game, I could only judge of its progress by the faces of those around me. A breathless silence prevailed, except when some particular subtlety in the play sent a murmur of admiration

round the room. Even this was hushed almost as soon as uttered. Gradually the interest grew more intense, and the bystanders pressed closer. De Caylus sighed impatiently, and passed his hand across his brow. It was his turn to deal. Dalrymple shuffled the pack. De Caylus shuffled them after him, and dealt. The falling of a pin might have been heard in the pause that followed. They had but five cards each. Dalrymple played first—a queen of diamonds. De Caylus played the king, and both threw down their cards. A loud murmur broke out instantaneously in every direction, and De Caylus, looking excited and weary, leaned back in his chair, and called for wine. His expression was so unlike that of a victor that I thought at first he must have lost the game.

“Which is the winner?” I asked, eagerly.
“Which is the winner?”

The gentleman who had replied to me before looked round with a smile of contemptuous wonder.

“Why, Monsieur de Caylus, of course,”

said he. "Did you not see him play the king?"

"I beg your pardon," I said, somewhat nettled; "but, as I said before, I do not understand the game."

"*Eh bien!* the Englishman is counting out his money."

What a changed scene it was! The circle of intent faces broken and shifting—the silence succeeded by a hundred conversations—De Caylus leaning back, sipping his wine and chatting over his shoulder—the cards pushed aside, and Dalrymple gravely sorting out little shining columns of Napoleons, and rolls of crisp bank paper! Having ranged all these before him in a row, he took out his cheque-book, filled in a page, tore it out, and laid it with the rest. Then, replacing the book in his breast-pocket, he pushed back his chair, and, looking up for the first time since the close of the game, said aloud:

"Monsieur le Vicomte de Caylus, I have this evening had the honour of losing the sum of twelve thousand francs to you; will you do me the favour to count this money?"

M. de Caylus bowed, emptied his glass, and languidly touching each little column with one dainty finger, told over his winnings as though they were scarcely worth even that amount of trouble.

“Six rouleaux of four hundred each,” said he, “making two thousand four hundred—six notes of five hundred each, making three thousand—and an order upon Rothschild for six thousand six hundred ; in all, twelve thousand. Thanks, Monsieur Monsieur forgive me for not remembering your name.”

Dalrymple looked up with a dangerous light in his eyes, and took no notice of the apology.

“It appears to me, Monsieur le Vicomte Caylus,” said he, giving the other his full title and speaking with singular distinctness, “that you hold the king very often at *écarté*.”

De Caylus looked up with every vein on his forehead suddenly swollen and throbbing.

“Monsieur !” he exclaimed, hoarsely.

“Especially when you deal,” added Dal-

rymple, smoothing his moustache with utter *sang-froid*, and keeping his eyes still riveted upon his adversary.

With an inarticulate cry like the cry of a wild beast, De Caylus sprang at him, foaming with rage, and was instantly flung back against the wall, dragging with him not only the table-cloth, but all the wine, money, and cards upon it.

"I will have blood for this!" he shrieked, struggling with those who rushed in between. "I will have blood! Blood! Blood!"

Stained and streaming with red wine, he looked, in his ghastly rage, as if he was already bathed in the blood he thirsted for.

Dalrymple drew himself to his full height, and stood looking on with folded arms and a cold smile.

"I am quite ready," he said, "to give Monsieur le Vicomte full satisfaction."

The room was by this time crowded to suffocation. I forced my way through, and laid my hand on Dalrymple's arm.

"You have provoked this quarrel," I said, reproachfully.

"That, my dear fellow, is precisely what I came here to do," he replied. "You will have to be my second in this affair."

Here De Simoncourt came up, and, hearing the last words, drew me aside.

"I act for De Caylus," he whispered. "Pistols, of course?"

I nodded, still all bewilderment at my novel position.

"Your man received the first blow, so is entitled to the first shot."

I nodded again.

"I don't know a better place," he went on, "than Bellevue. There's a famous little bit of plantation, and it is just far enough from Paris to be secure. The Bois is hackneyed, and the police are too much about it."

"Just so," I replied, vaguely.

"And when shall we say? The sooner the better, it always seems to me, in these cases."

"Oh, certainly—the sooner the better."

He looked at his watch.

"It is now ten minutes to five," he said.

“Suppose we allow them five hours to put their papers in order, and meet at Bellevue, on the terrace, at ten?”

“So soon!” I exclaimed.

“Soon!” echoed De Simoncourt. “Why, under circumstances of such exceeding aggravation, most men would send for pistols and settle it across the table!”

I shuddered. These niceties of honour were new to me, and I had been brought up to make little distinction between duelling and murder.

“Be it so, then, Monsieur De Simoncourt,” I said. “We will meet you at Bellevue, at ten.”

“On the terrace?”

“On the terrace.”

We bowed and parted. Dalrymple was already gone, and De Caylus, still white and trembling with rage, was wiping the wine from his face and shirt. The crowd opened for me right and left as I went through the *salon*, and more than one voice whispered——

“He is the Englishman’s second.”

I took my hat and coat mechanically, and let myself out. It was broad daylight, and the blinding sun poured full upon my eyes as I passed into the street.


"Come, Damon," said Dalrymple, crossing over to me from the opposite side of the way. "I have just caught a cab—there it is, waiting round the corner! We've no time to lose, I'll be bound."

"We are to meet them at Bellevue at ten," I replied.

"At ten? Hurrah! then I've still five certain hours of life before me! Long enough, Damon, to do a world of mischief, if one were so disposed!"

CHAPTER XVI.

The Duel at Bellevue.

E drove straight to Dalrymple's rooms, and, going in with a pass-key, went up without disturbing the *concierge*. Arrived at home, my friend's first act was to open his buffetier and take out a loaf, a *paté de foie gras*, and a bottle of wine. I could not eat a morsel; but he supped (or breakfasted) with a capital appetite; insisted that I should lie down on his bed for two or three hours; and slipping into his dressing-gown, took out his desk and cash-box, and settled himself to a regular morning's work.

"I hope to get a nap myself before starting," said he. "I have not many debts, and I made my will the day after I married—so

I have but little to transact in the way of business. A few letters to write—a few to burn—a trifle or two to seal up and direct to one or two fellows who may like a *souvenir*,—that is the extent of my task! Meanwhile, my dear boy, get what rest you can. It will never do to be shaky and pale on the field, you know.”

I went, believing that I should be less in his way; and, lying down in my clothes, fell into a heavy sleep, from which, after what seemed a long time, I woke suddenly with the conviction that it was just ten o'clock. To start up, look at my watch, find that it was only a quarter to seven and fall profoundly asleep again, was the work of only a few minutes. At the end of another half-hour I woke with the same dread, and with the same result; and so on twice or thrice after, till at a quarter to nine I jumped up, plunged my head into a basin of cold water, and went back to the sitting-room.

I found him lying forward upon the table, fast asleep, with his head resting on his hands. Some half-dozen letters lay folded

and addressed beside him—one directed to his wife. A little pile of burnt paper fluttered on the hearth. His pistols were lying close by in their mahogany case, the blue and white steel relieved against the crimson-velvet lining. He slept so soundly, poor fellow, that I could with difficulty make up my mind to wake him. Once roused, however, he was alert and ready in a moment, changed his coat, took out a new pair of lavender gloves, hailed a cab from the window, and bade the driver name his own fare if he got us to the terrace at Bellevue by five minutes before ten.

“I always like to be before my time in a matter of this kind, Damon,” said he. “It’s shabby to be merely punctual when one has, perhaps, not more than a quarter of an hour to live. By-the-by, here are my keys. Take them, in case of accident. You will find a copy of my will in my desk—the original is with my lawyer. The letters you will forward, according to the addresses; and in my cash-box you will find a paper directed to yourself.”

I bent my head. I would not trust myself to speak.

“As for the letter to H  l  ne—to my wife,” he said, turning his face away, “will you—will you deliver that with your own hands?”

“I will.”

“I—I have had but little time to write it,” he faltered, “and I trust to you to supply the details. Tell her how I made the quarrel, and how it ended. No one suspects it to be other than a *fracas* over a game at *  cart  *. No one supposes that I had any other motive, or any deeper vengeance—not even De Caylus! I have not compromised her by word or deed. If I shoot him, I free her without a breath of scandal. If I fall——”

His voice failed, and we were both silent for some moments.

We were now past the Barrier, and speeding on rapidly towards the open country. High white houses with jalousies closed against the sun, and pretty *maisonnettes* in formal gardens, succeeded the

streets and shops of suburban Paris. Then came a long country road bordered by poplars—by-and-by, glimpses of the Seine, and scattered farms and villages far away—then Sèvres and the leafy heights of Bellevue overhanging the river.

We crossed the bridge, and the driver, mindful of his fare, urged on his tired horse. Some country folks met us presently, and a waggoner with a load of fresh hay. They all smiled and gave us “good day” as we passed—they going to their work in the fields, and we to our work of bloodshed!

Shortly after this, the road began winding upwards, past the porcelain factories and through the village of Sèvres; after which, having but a short distance of very steep road to climb, we desired the cabman to wait, and went up on foot. Arrived at the top, where a peep of blue daylight came streaming down upon us through a green tunnel of acacias, we emerged all at once upon the terrace, and found ourselves first on the field. Behind us rose a hill-side of woods—before us, glassy and glittering, as if

traced upon the transparent air, lay the city of palaces. Domes and spires, arches and columns of triumph, softened by distance, looked as if built of the sunshine. Far away on one side stretched the Bois de Boulogne, undulating like a sea of tender green. Still farther away on the other, lay Père-la-Chaise—a dark hill specked with white; cypresses and tombs. At our feet, winding round a “lawny islet” and through a valley luxuriant in corn-fields and meadows, flowed the broad river, bluer than the sky.

“A fine sight, Damon!” said Dalrymple, leaning on the parapet, and coolly lighting a cigar. “If my eyes are never to open on the day again, I am glad they should have rested for the last time on a scene of so much beauty! Where is the painter who could paint it? Not Claude himself, though he should come back to life on purpose, and mix his colours with liquid sunlight!”

“You are a queer fellow,” said I, “to talk of scenery and painters at such a moment!”

“Not at all. Things are precious accord-

ing to the tenure by which we hold them. For my part, I do not know when I appreciated earth and sky so heartily as this morning. *Tiens!* here comes a carriage—our men, no doubt.”

“Are you a good shot?” I asked anxiously.

“Pretty well. I can write my initials in bullet-holes on a sheet of notepaper at forty paces, or toss up half-a-crown as I ride at full gallop, and let the daylight through it as it comes down.”

“Thank heaven!”

“Not so fast, my boy. De Caylus is just as fine a shot, and one of the most skilful swordsmen in the French service.”

“Ay, but the first fire is yours!”

“Is it? Well, I suppose it is. He struck the first blow, and so—here they come.”

“One more word, Dalrymple—did he really cheat you at *écarté*?”

“Upon my soul, I don’t know. He did hold the king very often, and there are some queer stories told of him in Vienna by the officers of the Emperor’s Guard. At all

events, this is not the first duel he has had to fight in defence of his good-fortune !”

De Simoncourt now coming forward, we adjourned at once to the wood behind the village. A little open glade was soon found ; the ground was soon measured ; the pistols were soon loaded. De Caylus looked horribly pale, but it was the pallor of concentrated rage, with nothing of the craven hue in it. Dalrymple, on the contrary, had neither more nor less colour than usual, and puffed away at his cigar with as much indifference as if he were waiting his turn at the pit of the Comédie Française. Both were clothed in black from head to foot, with their coats buttoned to the chin.

“ All is ready,” said De Simoncourt. “ Gentlemen, choose your weapons.”

De Caylus took his pistols one by one, weighed and poised them, examined the priming, and finally, after much hesitation, decided.

Dalrymple took the first that came to hand.

The combatants then took their places—

De Caylus with his hat pulled low over his eyes ; Dalrymple still smoking carelessly.

They exchanged bows.

“Major Dalrymple,” said De Simoncourt, “it is for you to fire first.”

“God bless you, Damon !” said my friend, shaking me warmly by the hand.

He then half turned aside, flung away the end of his cigar, lifted his right arm suddenly, and fired.

I heard the dull thud of the ball—I saw De Caylus fling up his arms and fall forward on the grass. I saw Dalrymple running to his assistance. The next instant, however, the wounded man was on his knees, ghastly and bleeding, and crying for his pistol.

“Give it me !” he gasped—“hold me up ! I—I will have his life yet ! So, steady—steady !”

Shuddering, but not for his own danger, Dalrymple stepped calmly back to his place ; while De Caylus, supported by his second, struggled to his feet and grasped his weapon. For a moment he once more stood upright. His eye burned ; his lips contract-

ed ; he seemed to gather up all his strength for one last effort. Slowly, steadily, surely, he raised his pistol—then swaying heavily back, fired, and fell again.

“Dead this time, sure enough,” said De Simoncourt, bending over him.

“Indeed, I fear so,” replied Dalrymple, in a low, grave voice. “Can we do nothing to help you, Monsieur de Simoncourt?”

“Nothing, thank you. I have a carriage down the road, and must get further assistance from the village. You had better lose no time in leaving Paris.”

“I suppose not. Good morning.”

“Good morning.”

So we lifted our hats ; gathered up the pistols ; hurried out of the wood and across a field, so avoiding the village ; found our cab waiting where we had left it ; and in less than five minutes, were rattling down the dusty hill again and hurrying towards Paris.

Once in the cab, Dalrymple began hastily pulling off his coat and waistcoat. I was startled to see his shirt-front stained with blood.

“Heavens!” I exclaimed, “you are not wounded?”

“Very slightly. De Caylus was too good a shot to miss me altogether. Pshaw! ’tis nothing—a mere graze—not even the bullet left in it!”

“If it had been a little more to the left” I faltered.

“If he had fired one second sooner, or lived one second longer, he would have had me through the heart, as sure as there’s a heaven above us!” said Dalrymple.

Then, suddenly changing his tone, he added, laughingly—

“Nonsense, Damon! cheer up, and help me to tear this handkerchief into bandages. Now’s the time to show off your surgery, my little Æsculapius. By Jupiter, life’s a capital thing, after all!”

CHAPTER XVII.

The Portrait.

HAVING seen Dalrymple to his lodgings and dressed his wound, which was, in truth, but a very slight one, I left him and went home, promising to return in a few hours, and help him with his packing; for we both agreed that he must leave Paris that evening, come what might.

It was now close upon two o'clock, and I had been out since between three and four the previous afternoon—not quite twenty-four hours, in point of actual time; but a week, a month, a year, in point of sensation! Had I not seen a man die since that hour yesterday?

Walking homewards through the garish

streets in the hot afternoon, all the strange scenes in which I had just been an actor thronged fantastically upon my memory. The joyous dinner with Franz Müller; the busy Temple; the noisy theatre; the long chase through the wet streets at midnight; the crowded gaming-house; the sweet country drive at early morning; the quiet wood, and the dead man lying on his back, with the shadows of the leaves upon his face,—all this, in strange distinctness, came between me and the living tide of the Boulevards.

And now, over-tired and over-excited as I was, I remembered for the first time that I had eaten nothing since half-past five that morning. And then I also remembered that I had left Müller waiting for me under the archway, without a word of explanation. I promised myself that I would write to him as soon as I got home, and in the meantime turned in at the first Café to which I came and called for breakfast. But when the breakfast was brought, I could not eat it. The coffee tasted bitter to me. The meat

stuck in my throat. I wanted rest more than food—rest of body and mind, and the forgetfulness of sleep! So I paid my bill, and, leaving the untasted meal, went home like a man in a dream.

Madame Bouïsse was not in her little lodge as I passed it—neither was my key on its accustomed hook. I concluded that she was cleaning my rooms, and so, going upstairs, found my door open. Hearing my own name, however, I paused involuntarily upon the threshold.

“And so, as I was saying,” pursued a husky voice, which I knew at once to be the property of Madame Bouïsse, “M’sieur Basil’s friend painted it on purpose for him; and I am sure if he was as good a Catholic as the Holy Father himself, and that picture was a true portrait of our Blessed Lady, he could not worship it more devoutly. I believe he says his prayers to it, mam’selle! I often find it in the morning stuck up by the foot of his bed; and when he comes home of an evening to study his books and papers, it always stands on a chair just in

front of his table, so that he can see it without turning his head, every time he lifts his eyes from the writing!"

In the murmured reply that followed, almost inaudible though it was, my ear distinguished a tone that set my heart beating.

"Well, I can't tell, of course," said Madame Bouïsse, in answer, evidently, to the remark just made; "but if mam'selle will only take the trouble to look in the glass, and then look at the picture, she will see how like it is. For my part, I believe it to be that, and nothing else. Do you suppose I don't know the symptoms? *Dame!* I have eyes, as well as my neighbours; and you may take my word for it, mam'selle, that poor young gentleman is just as much in love as ever a man was in this world!"

"No more of this, if you please, Madame Bouïsse," said Hortense, so distinctly that I could no longer be in doubt as to the speaker.

I stayed to hear no more; but retreating softly down the first flight of stairs, came

noisily up again, and went straight into my rooms, saying :—

“Madame Bouïsse, are you here?”

“Not only Madame Bouïsse, but an intruder who implores forgiveness,” said Hortense, with a frank smile, but a heightened colour.

I bowed profoundly. No need to tell her she was welcome—my face spoke for me.

“It was Madame Bouïsse who lured me in,” continued she, “to look at that painting.”

“*Mais, oui !* I told mam’selle you had her portrait in your sitting-room,” laughed the fat *concierge*, leaning on her broom. “I’m sure it’s quite like enough to be hers, bless her sweet face !”

I felt myself turn scarlet. To hide my confusion I took the picture down, and carried it to the window.

“You will see it better by this light,” I said, pretending to dust it with my handkerchief. “It is worth a close examination.”

Hortense knelt down, and studied it for some moments in silence.

“It must be a copy,” she said, presently, more to herself than me—“it must be a copy!”

“It is a copy,” I replied. “The original is at the Château de Sainte Aulaire, near Montlhéry.”

“May I ask how you came by it!”

“A friend of mine, who is an artist, copied it.”

“Then it was done especially for you?”

“Just so.”

“And, no doubt, you value it?”

“More than anything I possess!”

Then, fearing I had said too much, I added:—

“If I had not admired the original very much, I should not have wished for a copy.”

She shifted the position of the picture in such a manner that, standing where I did, I could no longer see her face.

“Then you have seen the original,” she said, in a low tone.

“Undoubtedly—and you?”

“Yes, I have seen it; but not lately.”

There was a brief pause.

“Madame Bouïsse thinks it so like yourself, mademoiselle,” I said, timidly, “that it might almost be your portrait.”

“I can believe it,” she answered. “It is very like my mother.”

Her voice faltered; and, still kneeling, she dropped her face in her hands, and wept silently.

Madame Bouïsse, in the meantime, had gone into my bed-chamber, where she was sweeping and singing to herself with the door three parts closed, believing, no doubt, that she was affording me the opportunity to make a formal declaration.

“Alas! mademoiselle,” I said, hesitatingly, “I little thought”

She rose, dashed the tears aside, and, holding out her hand to me, said, kindly—

“It is no fault of yours, fellow-student, if I remind you of the portrait, or if the portrait reminds me of one whom it resembles still more nearly. I am sorry to have troubled your kind heart with my griefs. It is not often that they rise to the surface.”

I raised her hand reverently to my lips.

"But you are looking worn and ill yourself," she added. "Is anything the matter?"

"Not now," I replied. "But I have been up all night, and—and I am very tired."

"Was this in your professional capacity?"

"Not exactly—and yet partly so. I have been more a looker-on than an active agent—and I have witnessed a frightful death-scene."

She sighed, and shook her head.

"You are not of the stuff that surgeons are made of, fellow-student," she said, kindly. "Instead of prescribing for others, you need some one to prescribe for you. Why, your hand is quite feverish. You should go to bed, and keep quiet for the next twelve hours."

"I will lie down for a couple of hours when Madame Bouïsse is gone; but I must be up and out again at six."

"Nay, that is in three hours."

"I cannot help it. It is my duty."

"Then I have no more to say. Would you drink some lemonade, if I made it for you?"

“ I would drink poison, if you made it for me !”

“ A decidedly misplaced enthusiasm !”
laughed she, and left the room.

CHAPTER XVIII.

News from England.

IT was a glorious morning—first morning of the first week in the merry month of June—as I took my customary way to Dr. Chéron's house in the Faubourg St. Germain. I had seen Dalrymple off by the night train the evening previous, and, refreshed by a good night's rest, had started somewhat earlier than usual, for the purpose of taking a turn in the Luxembourg Gardens before beginning my day's work.

There the blossoming parterres, the lavish perfume from geranium-bed and acacia-blossom, and the mad singing of the little birds up among the boughs, set me longing for

a holiday. I thought of Saxonholme, and the sweet English woodlands round about. I thought how pleasant it would be to go home to dear Old England, if only for ten days, and surprise my father in his quiet study. What if I asked Dr. Chéron to spare me for a fortnight?

Turning these things over in my mind, I left the gardens, and, arriving presently at the well-known Porte Cochère in the Rue de Mont Parnasse, rang the great bell, crossed the dull courtyard, and took my usual seat at my usual desk, not nearly so well disposed for work as usual.

"If you please, monsieur," said the solemn servant, making his appearance at the door, "Monsieur le Docteur requests your presence in his private room."

I went. Dr. Chéron was standing on the hearth-rug, with his back to the fire, and his arms folded over his breast. An open letter, bordered broadly with black, lay upon his desk. Although distant some two yards from the table, his eyes were fixed upon this paper. When I came in he looked

up, pointed to a seat, but himself remained standing and silent.

“Basil Arbuthnot,” he said, after a pause of some minutes, “I have this morning received a letter from England, by the early post.”

“From my father, sir?”

“No. From a stranger.”

“He looked straight at me as he said this, and hesitated.

“But it contains news,” he added, “that—that much concern you.”

There was a fixed gravity about the lines of his handsome mouth, and an unwonted embarrassment in his manner, that struck me with apprehension.

“Good news, I—I hope, sir,” I faltered.

“Bad news, my young friend,” said he, compassionately. “News that you must meet like a man, with fortitude—with resignation. Your father—your excellent father—my honoured friend——”

He pointed to the letter and turned away.

I rose up, sat down, rose up again, reach-

ed out a trembling hand for the letter, and read the loss that my heart had already presaged.

My father was dead.

Well as ever in the morning, he had been struck with apoplexy in the afternoon, and died in a few hours, apparently without pain.

The letter was written by our old family lawyer, and concluded with the request that Dr. Chéron would “break the melancholy news to Mr. Basil Arbuthnot, who would doubtless return to England for the funeral.”

My tears fell one by one upon the open letter. I had loved my father tenderly in my heart. His very roughnesses and eccentricities were dear to me. I could not believe that he was gone. I could not believe that I should never hear his voice again !

Dr. Chéron came over, and laid his hand upon my shoulder.

“Come,” he said, “you have much to do, and must soon be on your way. The express leaves at midday. It is now ten, you have only two hours left.”

“My poor father!”

“Brunet,” continued the Doctor, “shall go back with you to your lodgings and help you to pack. As for money——”

He took out his pocket-book and offered me a couple of notes; but I shook my head and put them from me.

“I have enough money, thank you,” I said. “Good-bye.”

“Good-bye,” he replied, and, for the first time in all these months, shook me by the hand. “You will write to me?”

I bowed my head in silence, and we parted. I found a cab at the door, and Brunet on the box. I was soon at home again. Home! I felt as if I had no home now, either in France or England—as if all my Paris life were a brief, bright dream, and this the dreary waking. Hortense was out. It was one of her busy mornings, and she would not be back till the afternoon. It was very bitter to leave without one last look—one last word. I seized pen and paper, and yielding for the first time to all the impulses of my love, wrote, without

weighing my words, these few brief sentences:—

“I have had a heavy loss, Hortense, and by the time you open this letter, I shall be far away. My father—my dear, good father—is no more. My mother died when I was a little child. I have no brothers—no sisters—no close family ties. I am alone in the world now—quite alone. My last thought here is of you. If it seems strange to speak of love at such a moment, forgive me, for that love is now my only hope. Oh, that you were here, that I might kiss your hand at parting, and know that some of your thoughts went with me! I cannot believe that you are quite indifferent to me. It seems impossible that, loving you as I love, so deeply, so earnestly, I should love in vain. When I come back I shall seek you here, where I have loved you so long. I shall look into your eyes for my answer, and read in them all the joy, or all the despair, of the life that lies before me. I had intended to get that portrait copied again for you, because you saw in it some likeness to your

mother; but there has been no time, and ere you receive this letter I shall be gone. I therefore send the picture to you by the *concierge*. It is my parting gift to you. I can offer no greater proof of my love. Farewell."

Once written, I dared not read the letter over. I thrust it under her door, and in less than five minutes was on my way to the station.

CHAPTER XIX.

The Fading of the Rainbow.

I loved a love once, fairest among women ;
Closed are her doors on me, I must not see her—
All, all are gone, the old familiar faces.

LAMB.

BEAUTIFULLY and truly, in the fourth book of the most poetical of stories, has a New World romancist described the state of a sorrowing lover. "All around him," saith he, "seemed dreamy and vague ; all within him, as in a sun's eclipse. As the moon, whether visible or invisible, has power over the tides of the ocean, so the face of that lady, whether present or absent, had power over the tides of his soul, both by day and night, both waking and sleeping. In every pale face and dark

eye he saw a resemblance to her ; and what the day denied him in reality, the night gave him in dreams."

Such was, very faithfully, my own condition of mind during the interval which succeeded my departure from Paris—the only difference being that Longfellow's hero was rejected by the woman he loved, and sorrowing for that rejection ; whilst I, neither rejected nor accepted, mourned another grief, and through the tears of that trouble, looked forward anxiously to my uncertain future.

I reached Saxonholme the night before my father's funeral, and remained there for ten days. I found myself, to my surprise, almost a rich man—that is to say, sufficiently independent to follow the bent of my inclinations as regarded the future.

My first impulse, on learning the extent of my means, was to relinquish a career that had been from the first distasteful to me—my second was to leave the decision to Hortense. To please her, to be worthy of her, to prove my devotion to her, was what

I most desired upon earth. If she wished to see me useful and active in my generation, I would do my best to be so for her sake—if, on the contrary, she only cared to see me content, I would devote myself henceforth to that life of “retired leisure” that I had always coveted. Could man love more honestly and heartily?

One year of foreign life had wrought a marked difference in me. I had not observed it so much in Paris; but here, amid old scenes and old reminiscences, I seemed to meet the image of my former self, and wondered at the change ’twixt now and then. I left home, timid, ignorant of the world and its ways, reserved, silent, almost misanthropic. I came back strengthened mentally and physically. Studious as ever, I could yet contemplate an active career without positive repugnance. I knew how to meet and treat my fellow-men; I was acquainted with society in its most refined and most homely phases. I had tasted of pleasure, of disappointment, of love—of all that makes life earnest.

As the time drew near when I should return to Paris, grief, and hope, and that strange reluctance which would fain defer the thing it most desires, perplexed and troubled me by day and night. Once again on the road, the past seemed more than ever dream-like, and Paris and Saxonholme became confused together in my mind, like the mingling outlines of two dissolving views.

I crossed the channel this time in a thick, misting rain ; pushed on straight for Paris, and reached the Cité Bergère in the midst of a warm and glowing afternoon. The great streets were crowded with carriages and foot-passengers. The trees were in their fullest leaf. The sun poured down on pavement and awning with almost tropical intensity. I dismissed my cab at the top of the Rue du Faubourg Montmartre, and went up to the house on foot. A flower-girl sat in the shade of the archway, tying up her flowers for the evening-sale, and I bought a cluster of white roses for Hortense as I went by.

Madame Bouïsse was sound asleep in her

little sanctum ; but my key hung in its old place, so I took it without disturbing her, and went up as if I had been away only a few hours. Arrived at the third story, I stopped outside Hortense's door and listened. All was very silent within. She was out, perhaps ; or writing quietly in the farther chamber. I thought I would leave my travelling-bag in my own room, and then ring boldly for admittance. I turned the key, and found myself once again in my own familiar, pleasant student home. The books and busts were there in their accustomed places ; everything was as I had left it. Everything, except the picture ! The picture was gone ; so Hortense had accepted it !

Three letters awaited me on the table ; one from Dr. Chéron, written in a bold hand—a mere note of condolence : one from Dalrymple, dated Chamounix : the third from Hortense. I knew it was from her. I knew that that small, clear, upright writing, so singularly distinct and regular, could be only hers. I had never seen it before ; but my heart identified it.

That letter contained my fate. I took it up, laid it down, paced backwards and forwards, and for several minutes dared not break the seal. At length I opened it. It ran thus :—

“FRIEND AND FELLOW-STUDENT,

“ I had hoped that a man such as you and a woman such as I might become true friends, discuss books and projects, give and take the lesser services of life, and yet not end by loving. In this belief, despite occasional misgivings, I have suffered our intercourse to become intimacy—our acquaintance, friendship. I see now that I was mistaken, and now, when it is, alas! too late, I reproach myself for the consequences of that mistake.

“I can be nothing to you, friend. I have duties in life more sacred than marriage. I have a task to fulfil which is sterner than love, and imperative as fate. I do not say that to answer you thus costs me no pain. Were there even hope, I would bid you hope ; but my labour presses heavily upon

me, and repeated failure has left me weary and heart-sick.

“ You tell me in your letter that, by the time I read it, you will be far away. It is now my turn to repeat the same words. When you come back to your rooms, mine will be empty. I shall be gone ; all I ask is, that you will not attempt to seek me.

“ Farewell. I accept your gift. Perhaps I act selfishly in taking it, but a day may come when I shall justify that selfishness to you. In the meantime, once again farewell. You are my only friend, and these are the saddest words I have ever written —forget me !

“ HORTENSE.”

I scarcely know how I felt, or what I did, on first reading this letter. I believe that I stood for a long time stone still, incapable of realizing the extent of my misfortune. By-and-by it seemed to rush upon me suddenly. I threw open my window, scaled the balcony rails, and forced my way into her rooms.

Her rooms! Ah, by that window she used to sit—at that table she read and wrote—in that bed she slept! All around and about were scattered evidences of her presence. Upon the chimney-piece lay an envelope addressed to her name—upon the floor, some fragments of torn paper and some ends of cordage! The very flowers were yet fresh upon her balcony! The sight of these things, while they confirmed my despair, thawed the ice at my heart. I kissed the envelope that she had touched, the flowers she had tended, the pillow on which her head had been wont to rest. I called wildly on her name. I threw myself on the floor in my great agony, and wept aloud.

I cannot tell how long I may have lain there; but it seemed like a life-time. Long enough, at all events, to drink the bitter draught to the last drop—long enough to learn that life had now no grief in store for which I should weep again.

CHAPTER XX.

*Treateth of many things ; but chiefly of Books
and Poets.*

Dreams, books, are each a world ; and books, we know,
Are a substantial world, both pure and good.

WORDSWORTH.



HERE are times when this beautiful world seems to put on a mourning garb, as if sympathising, like a gentle mother, with the grief that consumes us ; when the trees shake their arms in mute sorrow, and scatter their faded leaves like ashes on our heads ; when the slow rains weep down upon us, and the very clouds look cold above. Then, like Hamlet the Dane, we take no pleasure in the life that weighs so wearily upon us, and deem “ this

goodly frame, the earth, a sterile promontory; this most excellent canopy, the air, this brave, overhanging firmament, this majestical roof fretted with golden fire, a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours.”

So it was with me, in the heavy time that followed my return to Paris. I had lost everything in losing her I loved. I had no aim in life. No occupation. No hope. No rest. The clouds had rolled between me and the sun, and wrapped me in their cold shadows, and all was dark about me. I felt that I could say with an old writer—“For the world, I count it, not an inn, but an hospital; and a place, not to live, but to die in.”

Week after week I lingered in Paris, hoping against hope, and always seeking her. I had a haunting conviction that she was not far off, and that, if I only had strength to persevere, I must find her. Possessed by this fixed idea, I paced the sultry streets day after day throughout the burning months of June and July; lingered at dusk and early morning about the gardens of the Luxembourg, and such other

quiet places as she might frequent ; and, heedless alike of fatigue, or heat, or tempest, traversed the dusty city over and over again from barrier to barrier, in every direction.

Could I but see her once more—once only ! Could I but listen to her sweet voice, even though it bade me an eternal farewell ! Could I but lay my lips for the last, last time upon her hand, and see the tender pity in her eyes, and be comforted !

Seeking, waiting, sorrowing thus, I grew daily weaker and paler, scarcely conscious of my own failing strength, and indifferent to all things save one. In vain Dr. Chéron urged me to resume my studies. In vain Müller, ever cheerful and active, came continually to my lodgings, seeking to divert my thoughts into healthier channels. In vain I received letter after letter from Oscar Dalrymple, imploring me to follow him to Switzerland, where his wife had already joined him. I shut my eyes to all alike. Study had grown hateful to me ; Müller's cheerfulness jarred upon me ; Dalrymple

was too happy for my companionship. Liberty to pursue my weary search, peace to brood over my sorrow, were all that I now asked. I had not yet arrived at that stage when sympathy grows precious.

So weeks went by, and August came, and a slow conviction of the utter hopelessness of my efforts dawned gradually upon me. She was really gone. If she had been in Paris all this time pursuing her daily avocations, I must surely have found her. Where should I seek her next? What should I do with life, with time, with the future?

I resolved, at all events, to relinquish medicine at once, and for ever. So I wrote a brief farewell to Dr. Chéron and another to Müller, and, without seeing either again, returned abruptly to England.

I will not dwell on this part of my story ; enough that I settled my affairs as quickly as might be, left an old servant in care of the solitary house that had been my birthplace, and turned my back once more on Saxonholme, perhaps for years—perhaps for ever ;

and in less than three weeks was again on my way to the Continent.

The spirit of restlessness was now upon me. I had no home ; I had no peace ; and in place of the sun there was darkness. So I went with the thorns around my brow, and the shadow of the cross upon my breast. I went to suffer—to endure,—if possible, to forget. Oh, the grief of the soul which lives on in the night, and looks for no dawning ! Oh, the weary weight that presses down the tired eyelids, and yet leaves them sleepless ! Oh, the tide of alien faces, and the sickening remembrance of one, too dear, which may never be looked upon again ! I carried with me the antidote to every pleasure. In the midst of crowds, I was alone. In the midst of novelty, the one thought came, and made all stale to me. Like Dr. Donne, I dwelt with the image of my dead self at my side.

Thus for many, many months we journeyed together—I and my sorrow—and passed through fair and famous places, and saw the seasons change under new skies. To the quaint

old Flemish cities and the Gothic Rhine—to the plains and passes of Spain—to the unfrequented valleys of the Tyrol and the glacier-lands of Switzerland I went, but still found not the forgetfulness I sought. As in Holbein's fresco the skeleton plays his part in every scene, so my trouble stalked beside me, drank of my cup, and sat grimly at my table. It was with me in Naples and among the orange groves of Sorrento. It met me amid the ruins of the Roman Forum. It travelled with me over the blue Mediterranean, and landed beside me on the shores of the Cyclades. Go where I would, it possessed and followed me, and brooded over my head, like the cloud that rested on the ark.

Thinking over this period of my life, I seem to be turning the leaves of a rich album, or wandering through a gallery of glowing landscapes, and yet all the time to be dreaming. Faces grown familiar for a few days and never seen after—pictures photographed upon the memory in all their vividness—glimpses of cathedrals, of palaces,

of ruins, of sunset and storm, sea and shore, flit before me for a moment, and are gone like phantasmagoria.

And like phantasmagoria they impressed me at the time. Nothing seemed real to me. Startled, now and then, into admiration or wonder, my apathy fell from me like a garment, and my heart throbbed again as of old. But this was seldom—so seldom that I could almost count the times when it befell me.

Thus it was that travelling did me no permanent good. It enlarged my experience; it undoubtedly cultivated my taste; but it brought me neither rest, nor sympathy, nor consolation. On the contrary, it widened the gulf between me and my fellow-men. I formed no friendships. I kept up no correspondence. A sojourner in hotels, I became more and more withdrawn from all tender and social impulses, and almost forgot the very name of home. So strong a hold did this morbid love of self-isolation take upon me, that I left Florence on one occasion, after a stay of only three days, because

I had seen the names of a Saxonholme family among the list of arrivals in the *Giornale Toscano*.

Three years went by thus—three springs—three vintages—three winters—till, weary of wandering, I began to ask myself “what next?” My old passion for books had, in the meantime, re-asserted itself, and I longed once more for quiet. I knew now that my pilgrimage was hopeless. I knew that I loved her ever; that I could never forget her; that although the first pangs were past, I yet must bear

“All the aching of heart, the restless, unsatisfied longing,
All the dull, deep pain, and constant anguish of patience!”

I reasoned with myself. I resolved to be stronger—at all events, to be calmer. Exhausted and world-worn, I turned in thought to my native village among the green hills, to my deserted home, and the great solitary study with its busts and bookshelves, and its vista of neglected garden. The rooms where my mother died; where my father wrote; where, as a boy, I dreamed and

studied, would at least have memories for me.

Perhaps, silently underlying all these motives, I may at this time already have begun to entertain one other project which was not so much a motive as a hope—not so much a hope as a half-seen possibility. I had written verses from time to time all my life long, and of late they had come to me more abundantly than ever. They flowed in upon me at times like an irresistible tide ; at others they ebbed away for weeks, and seemed as if gone for ever. It was a power over which I had no control, and sought to have none. I never tried to make verses ; but, when the inspiration was upon me, I made them, as it were, in spite of myself. My desk was full of them in time —sonnets, scraps of songs, fragments of blank verse, attempts in all sorts of queer and rugged metres—hexameters, pentameters, alcaics, and the like ; with, here and there, a dialogue out of an imaginary tragedy, or a translation from some Italian or German poet. This taste grew by degrees to be a rare and subtle

pleasure to me. My rhymes became my companions, and when the interval of stagnation came, I was restless and lonely till it passed away.

At length there came an hour (I was lying, I remember, on a ledge of turf on a mountain side, overlooking one of the Italian valleys of the Alps), when I asked myself for the first time——

“Am I also a poet?”

I had never dreamed of it, never thought of it, never even hoped it, till that moment. I had scribbled on, idly, carelessly, out of what seemed a mere facile impulse, correcting nothing; seldom even reading what I had written, after it was committed to paper. I had sometimes been pleased with a melodious cadence or a happy image—sometimes amused with my own flow of thought and readiness of versification; but that I, simple Basil Arbuthnot, should be, after all, enriched with this splendid gift of song—was it mad presumption, or were these things proof? I knew not; but, lying on the parched grass of the mountain-side, I tried the ques-

tion over in my mind this way and that, till "my heart beat in my brain." How should I come at the truth? How should I test whether this opening Paradise was indeed Eden, or only the mirage of my fancy—mere sunshine upon sand? We all write verses at some moment or other in our lives, even the most prosaic amongst us—some because they are happy; some because they are sad; some because the living fire of youth impels them, and they must be up and doing, let the work be what it may.

"Many fervent souls,
Strike rhyme on rhyme, who would strike steel on steel,
If steel had offer'd."

Was this case mine? Was I fancying myself a poet, only because I was an idle man, and had lost the woman I loved? To answer these questions myself was impossible. They could only be answered by the public voice, and before I dared question that oracle I had much to do. I resolved to discipline myself to the harness of rhythm. I resolved to go back to the fathers of

poetry—to graduate once again in Homer and Dante, Chaucer and Shakspeare. I promised myself that, before I tried my wings in the sun, I would be my own severest critic. Nay, more—that I would never try them so long as it seemed possible a fall might come of it. Once come to this determination, I felt happier and more hopeful than I had felt for the last three years. I looked across the blue mists of the valley below, and up to the aerial peaks which rose, faint, and far, and glittering—mountain beyond mountain, range above range, as if painted on the thin, transparent air—and it seemed to me that they stood by, steadfast and silent, the witnesses of my resolve.

“I will be strong,” I said. “I will be an idler and a dreamer no longer. Books have been my world. I have taken all, and given nothing. Now I too will work, and work to prove that I was not unworthy of her love.”

Going down, by-and-by, into the valley as the shadows were lengthening, I met a

traveller with an open book in his hand. He was an Englishman—small, sallow, wiry, and wore a grey, loose coat, with two large pockets full of books. I had met him once before at Milan, and again in a steamer on Lago Maggiore. He was always reading. He read in the diligence—he read when he was walking—he read all through dinner at the *tables-d'hôte*. He had a mania for reading; and might, in fact, be said to be bound up in his own library.

Meeting thus on the mountain, we fell into conversation. He told me that he was on his way to Geneva, that he detested continental life, and that he was only waiting the arrival of certain letters before starting for England.

“But,” said I, “you do not, perhaps, give continental life a fair trial. You are always absorbed in the pages of a book; and, as for the scenery, you appear not to observe it.”

“Deuce take the scenery!” he exclaimed, pettishly. “I never look at it. All scenery’s alike. Trees, mountains, water—

water, mountains, trees : the same thing over and over again, like the bits of coloured glass in a kaleidoscope. I read about the scenery, and that is quite enough for me."

"But no book can paint an Italian lake or an Alpine sunset ; and when one is on the spot . . ."

"I beg your pardon," interrupted the traveller in grey. "Everything is much pleasanter and more picturesque in books than in reality—travelling especially. There are no bad smells in books. There are no long bills in books. Above all, there are no mosquitoes. Travelling is the greatest mistake in the world, and I am going home as fast as I can."

"And henceforth, I suppose, your travels will be confined to your library," I said, smiling.

"Exactly so. I may say, with Hazlitt, that 'food, warmth, sleep, and a book,' are all I require. With those I may make the tour of the world, and incur neither expense nor fatigue."

“Books, after all, are friends,” I said, with a sigh.

“Sir,” replied the traveller, waving his hand somewhat theatrically, “books are our first real friends, and our last. I have no others. I wish for no others. I rely upon no others. They are the only associates upon whom a sensible man may depend. They are always wise, and they are always witty. They never intrude upon us when we desire to be alone. They never speak ill of us behind our backs. They are never capricious, and never surly; neither are they, like some clever folks, pertinaciously silent when we most wish them to shine. Did Shakspeare ever refuse his best thoughts to us, or Montaigne decline to be companionable? Did you ever find Molière dull? or Lamb prosy? or Scott unentertaining?”

“You remind me,” said I, laughing, “of the student in Chaucer, who desired for his only pleasure and society,

“—at his bedde’s head

A twenty bokes clothed in black and red,
Of Aristotle and his philosophy!”

“Ay,” replied my new acquaintance, “but he preferred them expressly to ‘*robès riche*, or *fidel* or *sautrie*,’ whereas, I prefer them to men and women, and to Aristotle and his philosophy, into the bargain!”

“Your own philosophy, at least, is admirable,” said I. “For many a year—I might almost say for most years of my life—I have been a disciple in the same school.”


“Sir, you cannot belong to a better. Think of the convenience of always carrying half a dozen intimate friends in your pocket! Good afternoon.”

We had now come to a point where two paths diverged, and the reading traveller, always economical of time, opened his book where he had last turned down the leaf, and disappeared round the corner.

I never saw him again; but his theory amused me, and, as trifles will sometimes do even in the gravest matters, decided me. So the result of all my hopes and reflections was that I went back to England and to the student life that had been the dream of my youth.

CHAPTER XXI.

My Birthday.

HREE years of foreign travel, and five of retirement at home, brought my twenty-ninth birthday. I was still young, it is true; but how changed from that prime of early manhood when I used to play Romeo at midnight to Hortense upon her balcony! I looked at myself in the glass that morning, and contemplated the wearied, bronzed, and bearded face which

“ . . . seared by toil and something touch'd by time,”

now gave me back glance for glance. I looked older than my age by many years. My eyes had grown grave with a steadfast melancholy, and streaks of premature silver gleamed here and there in the still abundant

hair which had been the solitary vanity of my youth.

“Is she also thus changed and faded?” I asked myself, as I turned away. And then I sighed to think that if we met she might not know me.

For I loved her still ; worshipped her ; raised altars to her in the dusky chambers of my memory. My whole life was dedicated to her. My best thoughts were hers. My poems, my ambition, my hours of labour, all were hers only ! I knew now that no time could change the love which had so changed me, or dim the sweet remembrance of that face which I carried for ever at my heart, like an amulet. Other women might be fair, but my eyes never sought them ; other voices might be sweet, but my ear never listened to them ; other hands might be soft, but my lips never pressed them. She was the only woman in all my world—the only star in all my night—the one Eve of my ruined Paradise. In a word, I loved her—loved her, I think, more dearly than before I lost her.

“Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove :
O no ! it is an ever-fixed mark,
That looks on tempests and is never shaken.”

I had that morning received by post a parcel of London papers and magazines, which, for a foolish reason of my own, I almost dreaded to open ; so, putting off the evil hour, I thrust the ominous parcel into my pocket and went out to read it in some green solitude, far away among the lonely hills and tracts of furzy common that extend for miles and miles around my native place. It was a delicious autumn morning, bright and fresh and joyous as spring. The purple heather was all a-bloom along the slopes of the hill-sides. The golden sand-cliffs glittered in the sun. The great fir-woods reached away over heights and through valleys—“grand and spiritual trees,” pointing ever upward with warning finger, like the Apostles in the old Italian pictures. Now I passed a solitary farm-yard where busy labourers were piling the latest stacks ; now met a group of happy children gather-

ing wild nuts and blackberries. By-and-by, I came upon a great common, with a picturesque mill standing high against the sky. All around and about stretched a vast prospect of woodland and tufted heath, bounded far off by a range of chalk-hills speckled with farm-houses and villages, and melting towards the west into a distance faint and far, and mystic as the horizon of a Turner.

Here I threw myself on the green turf and rested. Truly, Nature is a great "physician of souls." The peace of the place descended into my heart, and hushed for awhile the voice of its repinings. The delicious air, the living silence of the woods, the dreamy influences of the autumnal sunshine, all alike served to lull me into a pleasant mood, neither gay nor sad, but very calm—calm enough for the purpose for which I had come. So I brought out my packet of papers, summoned all my philosophy to my aid, and met my own name upon the second page. For here was, as I had anticipated, a critique on my first volume of poems.

Indifference to criticism, if based upon a simple consciousness of moral right, is a noble thing. But indifference to criticism, taken in its ordinary, and especially its literary sense, is generally a very small thing, and resolves itself, for the most part, into a halting and one-sided kind of stoicism, meaning indifference to blame and ridicule, and never indifference to praise. It is very convenient to the disappointed authorling; very effective in the established writer; but it is mere vanity at the root, and equally contemptible in both. For my part, I confess that I came to my trial as tremblingly as any poor caitiff to the fiery ordeal, and finding myself miraculously clear of the burning ploughshares, was quite as full of wonder and thankfulness at my good fortune. For I found my purposes appreciated, and my best thoughts understood; not, it is true, without some censure, but it was censure tempered so largely with encouragement that I drew hope from it, and not despondency. And then I thought of Hortense, and, picturing to myself all the

joy it would have been to lay these things at her feet, I turned my face to the grass, and wept like a child.

Then, one by one, the ghosts of my dead hopes rose out of the grave of the past and vanished "into thin air" before me; and in their place came earnest aspirations, born of the man's strong will. I resolved to use wisely the gifts that were mine—to sing well the song that had risen to my lips—to "seize the spirit of my time," and turn to noble uses the God-given weapons of the poet. So should I be worthier of her remembrance, if she yet remembered me—worthier, at all events, to remember her.

Thus the hours ebbed, and when I at length rose and turned my face homeward, the golden day was already bending westward. Lower and lower sank the sun as the miles shortened; stiller and sweeter grew the evening air; and ever my lengthening shadow travelled before me along the dusty road—wherein I was more fortunate than the man in the German story who sold his to the devil.

It was quite dusk by the time I gained the outskirts of the town, and I reflected with much contentment upon the prospect of a cosy bachelor dinner, and, after dinner, lamplight and a book.

“If you please, sir,” said Collins, “a lady has been here.”

Collins—the same Collins who had been my father’s servant when I was a boy at home—was now a grave married man, with hair fast whitening.

“A lady?” I echoed. “One of my cousins, I suppose, from Effingham.”

“No, sir,” said Collins. “A strange lady—a foreigner.”

A stranger! a foreigner! I felt myself change colour.

“She left her name?” I asked.

“Her card, sir,” said Collins, and handed it to me.

I took it up with fingers that shook in spite of me, and read:—

MADLLE. DE SAINTE AULAIRE.

I dropped the card, with a sigh of profound disappointment.

“At what time did this lady call, Collins?”

“Not very long after you left the house, sir. She said she would call again. She is at the White Horse.”

“She shall not have the trouble of coming here,” I said, drawing my chair to the table. “Send James up to the White Horse with my compliments, and say that I will wait upon the lady in about an hour’s time.”

Collins darted away to despatch the message, and returning presently with the pale ale, uncorked it dexterously, and stood at the side-board, serenely indifferent.

“And what kind of person was this—this Mademoiselle de Sainte Aulaire, Collins?” I asked, leisurely bisecting a partridge.

“Can’t say, sir, indeed. Lady kept her veil down.”

“Humph! Tall or short, Collins?”

“Rather tall, sir.”

“Young?”

“Haven’t an idea, sir. Voice very pleasant, though.”

A pleasant voice has always a certain attraction for me. Hortense's voice was exquisite—rich and low, and somewhat deeper than the voices of most women.

I took up the card again. Mademoiselle de Sainte Aulaire! Where had I heard that name?

"She said nothing of the nature of her business, I suppose, Collins?"

"Nothing at all, sir. Dear me, sir, I beg pardon for not mentioning it before; but there's been a messenger over from the White Horse, since the lady left, to know if you were yet home."

"Then she is in haste?"

"Very uncommon haste, I should say, sir," replied Collins, deliberately.

I pushed back the untasted dish, and rose directly.

"You should have told me this before," I said, hastily.

"But—but surely, sir, you will dine—"

"I will wait for nothing," I interrupted.
"I'll go at once. Had I known the lady's

business was urgent, I would not have delayed a moment."

Collins cast a mournful glance at the table, and sighed respectfully. Before he had recovered from his amazement, I was half way to the inn.

The White Horse was now the leading hostelry of Saxonholme. The old Red Lion was no more. Its former host and hostess were dead ; a brewery occupied its site ; and the White Horse was kept by a portly Boniface, who had been head-waiter under the extinct dynasty. But there had been many changes in Saxonholme since my boyish days, and this was one of the least among them.

I was shown into the best sitting-room, preceded by a smart waiter in a white neck-cloth. At a glance I took in all the bearings of the scene—the table with its untasted dessert ; the shaded lamp ; the closed curtains of red damask ; the thoughtful figure in the easy chair. Although the weather was yet warm, a fire blazed in the grate ; but the windows were open behind the crimson cur-

tains, and the evening air stole gently in. It was like stepping into a picture by Gerard Dow, so closed, so glowing, so rich in colour.

“Mr. Arbuthnot,” said the smart waiter, flinging the door very wide open, and lingering to see what might follow.

The lady rose slowly, bowed, waved her hand towards a chair at some distance from her own, and resumed her seat. The waiter reluctantly left the room.

“I had not intended, sir, to give you the trouble of coming here,” said Mademoiselle de Sainte Aulaire, using her fan as a hand-screen, and speaking in a low, and, as it seemed to me, a somewhat constrained voice. I could not see her face, but something in the accent made my heart leap.

“Pray do not name it, madam,” I said. “It is nothing.”

She bent her head, as if thanking me, and went on :—

“I have come to this place,” she said, “in order to prosecute certain inquiries which are of great importance to myself. May I

ask if you are a native of Saxonholme?"

"I am."

"Were you here in the year 18—?"

"I was."

"Will you give me leave to test your memory respecting some events that took place about that time?"

"By all means."

Mademoiselle de Sainte Aulaire thanked me with a gesture, withdrew her chair still farther from the radius of the lamp and the fire, and said :—

"I must entreat your patience if I first weary you with one or two particulars of my family history."

"Madam, I listen."

During the brief pause that ensued, I tried vainly to distinguish something more of her features. I could only trace the outline of a slight and graceful figure, the contour of a very slender hand, and the ample folds of a dark silk dress.

At length, in a low, sweet voice, she began :—

"Not to impose upon you any dull gene-

alogical details," she said, "I will begin by telling you that the Sainte Aulaires are an ancient French family of Bearnais extraction, and that my grandfather was the last Marquis who bore the title. Holding large possessions in the *comtat* of Venaissin (a district which now forms part of the department of Vaucluse) and other demesnes at Montlhéry, in the province of the Ile de France——"

"At Montlhéry!" I exclaimed, suddenly recovering the lost link in my memory.

"The Sainte Aulaires," continued the lady, without pausing to notice my interruption, "were sufficiently wealthy to keep up their social position, and to contract alliances with many of the best families in the south of France. Towards the early part of the reign of Louis XIII. they began to be conspicuous at court, and continued to reside in and near Paris up to the period of the Revolution. Marshals of France, Envoys, and Ministers of State during a period of nearly a century and a half, the Sainte Aulaires had enjoyed too many honours not

to be among the first of those who fell in the Reign of Terror. My grandfather, who, as I have already said, was the last Marquis bearing the title, was seized with his wife and daughter at his Château near Montlhéry in the spring-time of 1793, and carried to La Force. Thence, after a mock trial, they were all three conveyed to execution, and publicly guillotined on the sixth of June in the same year. Do you follow me?"

"Perfectly."

"One survivor, however, remained in the person of Charles Armand, Prévôt de Sainte Aulaire, only son of the Marquis, then a youth of seventeen years of age, and pursuing his studies in the seclusion of an old family seat in Vaucluse. He fled into Italy. In the meantime, his inheritance was confiscated; and the last representative of the race, reduced to exile and beggary, assumed another name. It were idle to attempt to map out his life through the years that followed. He wandered from land to land; lived none knew how; became a tutor, a miniature painter, a volunteer at Naples under

General Pepe, a teacher of languages in London, corrector of the press to a publishing house in Brussels—everything or anything, in short, by which he could honourably earn his bread. During these years of toil and poverty, he married. The lady was an orphan, of Scotch extraction, poor and proud as himself, and governess in a school near Brussels. She died in the third year of their union, and left him with one little daughter. This child became henceforth his only care and happiness. While she was yet a mere infant, he placed her in the school where her mother had been teacher. There she remained, first as pupil, by-and-by as governess, for more than sixteen years. The child was called by an old family name that had been her grandmother's and her great-grandmother's in the high and palmy days of the Sainte Aulaires—Hortense."

"Hortense!" I cried, rising from my chair.

"It is not an uncommon name," said the lady. "Does it surprise you?"

“I—I beg your pardon, madam,” I stammered, resuming my seat. “I once had a dear friend of that name. Pray go on.”

“For ten years the refugee contrived to keep his little Hortense in the safe and pleasant shelter of her Flemish home. He led a wandering life, no one knew where; and earned his money, no one knew how. Travel-worn and careworn, he was prematurely aged, and at fifty might well have been mistaken for a man of sixty-five or seventy. Poor and broken as he was, however, Monsieur de Sainte Aulaire was every inch a gentleman of the old school; and his little girl was proud of him, when he came to the school to see her. This, however, was very seldom—never oftener than twice or three times in the year. When she saw him for the last time, Hortense was about thirteen years of age. He looked paler, and thinner, and poorer than ever; and when he bade her farewell, it was as if under the presentiment that they might meet no more. He

then told her, for the first time, something of his story, and left with her at parting a small coffer containing his decorations, a few trinkets that had been his mother's, and his sword—the badge of his nobility.”

The lady's voice faltered. I neither spoke nor stirred, but sat like a man of stone.

Then she went on again:—

“The father never came again. The child, finding herself after a certain length of time thrown upon the charity of her former instructors, was glad to become under-teacher in their school. The rest of her history may be told in a few words. From under-teacher she became head-teacher, and at eighteen passed as governess into a private family. At twenty she removed to Paris, and set foot for the first time in the land of her fathers. All was now changed in France. The Bourbons reigned again, and her father, had he reappeared, might have reclaimed his lost estates. She sought him far and near. She employed agents to discover him. She could not believe that he was dead. To be

once again clasped in his arms—to bring him back to his native country—to see him resume his name and station—this was the bright dream of her life. To accomplish these things she laboured in many ways, teaching and writing; for Hortense also was proud—too proud to put forward an unsupported claim. For with her father were lost the title-deeds and papers that might have made the daughter wealthy, and she had no means of proving her identity. Still she laboured heartily, lived poorly, and earned enough to push her inquiries far and wide—even to journey hither and thither, whenever she fancied, alas! that a clue had been found. Twice she travelled into Switzerland, and once into Italy, but always in vain. The exile had too well concealed, even from her, his *sobriquet* and his calling, and Hortense at last grew weary of failure. One fact, however, she succeeded in discovering, and only one—namely, that her father had, many years before, made some attempt to establish his claims to the estates, but that he had failed for want

either of sufficient proof, or of means to carry on the *procès*. Of even this circumstance only a meagre law record remained, and she could succeed in learning no more. Since then, a claim has been advanced by a remote branch of the Sainte Aulaire family, and the cause is, even now, in course of litigation."

She paused, as if fatigued by so long talking; but, seeing me about to speak, prevented me with a gesture of the hand, and resumed:—

"Hortense de Ste. Aulaire continued to live in Paris for nearly five years, at the end of which time she left it to seek out the members of her mother's family. Finding them kindly disposed towards her, she took up her abode amongst them in the calm seclusion of a remote Scotch town. There, even there, she still hoped, still employed agents; still yearned to discover, if not her father, at least her father's grave. Several years passed thus. She continued to earn a modest subsistence by her pen, till at length the death of one of those Scotch relatives left her mistress of a small

inheritance. Money was welcome, since it enabled her to pursue her task with renewed vigour. She searched farther and deeper. A trivial circumstance eagerly followed up brought a train of other circumstances to light. She discovered that her father had assumed a certain name; she found that the bearer of this name was a wandering man, a conjurer by trade; she pursued the vague traces of his progress from town to town, from county to county, sometimes losing, sometimes regaining the scattered links. Sir, he was my father—I am that Hortense. I have spent my life seeking him—I have lived for this one hope. I have traced his footsteps here to Saxonholme, and here the last clue fails. If you know anything—if you can remember anything——”

Calm and collected as she had been at first, she was trembling now, and her voice died away in sobs. The firelight fell upon her face—upon the face of my lost love!

I also was profoundly agitated.

“Hortense,” I said, “do you not know that he who stood beside your father in his

last hour, and he who so loved you years ago, are one and the same? Alas! why did you not tell me these things long since?"

"Did *you* stand beside my father's death-bed?" she asked brokenly.

"I did."

She clasped her hands over her eyes and shuddered, as if beneath the pressure of a great physical pain.

"O God!" she murmured, "so many years of denial and suffering! so many years of darkness that might have been dispelled by a word!"

We were both silent for a long time. Then I told her all that I remembered of her father; how he came to Saxonholme—how he fell ill—how he died, and was buried. It was a melancholy recital; painful for me to relate—painful for her to hear—and interrupted over and over again by questions and tears, and bursts of un-availing sorrow.

"We will visit his grave to-morrow," I said, when all was told.

She bent her head.

"To-morrow, then," said she, "I end the pilgrimage of years."

"And—and afterwards?" I faltered.

"Afterwards? Alas! friend, when the hopes of years fall suddenly to dust and ashes, one feels as if there were no future to follow?"

"It is true," I said gloomily. "I know it too well."

"You know it?" she exclaimed, looking up.

"I know it, Hortense. There was a moment in which all the hope, and the fulness, and the glory of my life went down at a blow. Have you not heard of ships that have gone to the bottom in fair weather, suddenly, with all sail set, and every hand on board?"

She looked at me with a strange earnestness in her eyes, and sighed heavily.

"What have you been doing all this time, fellow-student?" she asked, after a pause.

The old name sounded very sweet upon her lips!

“I? Alas!—nothing.”

“But you are a surgeon, are you not?”

“No. I never even went up for examination. I gave up all idea of medicine as a profession when my father died.”

“What are you, then?”

“An idler upon the great highway—a book-dreamer—a library fixture.”

Hortense looked at me thoughtfully, with her cheek resting on her hand.

“Have you done nothing but read and dream?”

“Not quite. I have travelled.”

“With what object?”

“A purely personal one. I was alone and unhappy, and——”

“And fancied that purposeless wandering was better for you than healthy labour. Well, you have travelled, and you have read books. What more?”

“Nothing more, except——”

“Except what?”

I chanced to have one of the papers in my pocket, and so drew it out, and placed it before her.

“I have been a rhymers as well as a dreamer,” I said, shyly. “Perhaps the rhymes grew out of the dreams, as the dreams themselves grew out of something else which has been underlying my life this many a year. At all events, I have hewn a few of them into shape, and trusted them to paper and type—and here is a critique which came to me this morning with some three or four others.”

She took the paper with a smile half of wonder, half of kindness, and, glancing quickly through it, said:—

“This is well. This is very well. I must read the book. Will you lend it to me?”

“I will give it to you,” I replied; “if I can give you that which is already yours.”

“Already mine?”

“Yes, as the poet in me, however worthless, is all and only yours! Do you suppose, Hortense, that I have ever ceased to love you? As my songs are born of my sorrow, so my sorrow was born of my love; and love, and sorrow, and song, such as they are, are of your making.”

“Hush!” she said, with something of her old gay indifference. “Your literary sins must not be charged upon me, fellow-student! I have enough of my own to answer for. Besides, I am not going to acquit you so easily. Granted that you have written a little book of poetry—what then? Have you done nothing else? Nothing active? Nothing manly? Nothing useful?”

“If by usefulness and activity you mean manual labour, I certainly have neither felled a tree, nor ploughed a field, nor hammered a horse-shoe. I have lived by thought alone.”

“Then I fear you have lived a very idle life,” said Hortense, smiling. “Are you married?”

“Married!” I echoed, indignantly. “How can you ask the question?”

“You are not a magistrate?”

“Certainly not.”

“In short, then, you are perfectly useless. You play no part, domestic or public. You serve neither the state nor the community. You are a mere cypher—a make-weight in

the social scale—an article of no value to any one except the owner.”

“Not even the latter, mademoiselle,” I replied, bitterly. “It is long since I have ceased to value my own life.”

She smiled again, but her eyes this time were full of tears.

“Nay,” said she, softly, “am I not the owner?”

* * * * *

Great joys at first affect us like great griefs. We are stunned by them, and know not how deep they are till the night comes with its solemn stillness, and we are alone with our own hearts. Then comes the season of thankfulness, and wonder, and joy. Then our souls rise up within us, and chant a hymn of praise; and the great vault of heaven is as the roof of a mighty cathedral studded with mosaics of golden stars; and the night winds join in with the bass of their mighty organ-pipes; and the poplars rustle, like the leaves of the hymn-books in the hands of the congregation.

So it was with me that evening when I went forth into the quiet fields where the summer moon was shining, and knew that Hortense was mine at last—mine now and for ever. Overjoyed and restless, I wandered about for hours. I could not go home. I felt I must breathe the open air of the hills, and tread the dewy grass, and sing my hymn of praise and thanksgiving after my own fashion. At length, as the dawning light came widening up the east, I turned my steps homewards, and before the sun had risen above the farthest pine-ridge, I was sleeping the sweetest sleep that had been mine for years.

The conjurer's grave was green with grass and purple with wild thyme when Hortense knelt beside it, and there consummated the weary pilgrimage of half a life. The sapling willow had spread its arms above him in a pleasant canopy, leaning farther and reaching higher, year by year.

“And lo! the twig to which they laid his head had now become a tree!”

Hortense found nothing of her father but

this grave. Papers and title-deeds there were none.

I well remembered the anxious search made thirteen years ago, when not even a card was found to indicate the whereabouts of his friends or family. Not to lose the vestige of a chance, we pushed inquiry farther; but in vain. Our rector, now a very old man, remembered nothing of the wandering lecturer. Mine host and hostess of the Red Lion were both dead. The Red Lion itself had disappeared, and become a thing of tradition. All was lost and forgotten; and of all her hereditary wealth, station, and honours, Hortense de Sainte Aulaire retained nothing but her father's sword and her ancestral name.

——Not even the latter for many weeks, O discerning reader! for before the golden harvest was gathered in, we two were wedded.

CHAPTER XXII.

Bringeth this True Story to an End.

Ye who have traced the pilgrim to the scene
Which is his last, if in your memories dwell
A thought that once was his, if on ye swell
A single recollection, not in vain
He wore his sandal shoon and scallop-shell.

BYRON



HAVING related the story of my life as it happened, incident by incident, and brought it down to that point at which stories are wont to end, I find that I have little to add respecting others. My narrative from first to last has been purely personal. The one love of my life was Hortense—the one friend of my life, Oscar Dalrymple. The catalogue of my acquaintances would scarcely number so

many names as I have fingers on one hand. The two first are still mine; the latter, having been brought forward only in so far as they re-acted upon my feelings or modified my experiences, have become, for the most part, mere memories, and so vanish, ghost-like, from the page. Franz Müller is studying in Rome, having carried off a prize at the Ecole des Beaux Arts, which entitles him to three years at the Villa Medici, that Ultima Thule of the French art-student's ambition. I hear that he is as full of whim and jest as ever, and the very life of the Café Greco. May I some day hear his pleasant laugh again! Dr. Chéron, I believe, is still practising in Paris; and Monsieur de Simoncourt, I have no doubt, continues to exercise the profession of Chevalier d'Industrie, with such failures and successes as are incidental to that career.

As for my early *amourettes*, they have disappeared from my path as utterly as though they had never crossed it. Of Madame de Marignan, I have neither heard, nor desired to hear, more. Even Josephine's

pretty face is fast fading from my memory. It is ever thus with the transient passions of our *première jeunesse*. We believe in them for the moment, and waste laughter and tears, chaplets and sackcloth, upon them. Presently the delusion passes; the earnest heart within us is awakened; and we know that till now we have been mere actors in “a masquerade of dreams.” The chaplets were woven of artificial flowers. The funeral was a mock funeral—the banquet a stage feast of painted fruits and empty goblets! Alas! we cannot undo that foolish past. We may only hope to blot it out with after-records of high, and wise, and tender things. Thus it is that the young man’s heart is like the precious palimpsest of old. He first of all defiles it with idle anacreontics in praise of love and wine; but, erasing these by-and-by with his own pious hand, he writes it over afresh with chronicles of a pure and holy passion, and dedicates it to the fair saint of all his orisons.

Dalrymple and his wife are now settled in Italy, having purchased a villa in the

neighbourhood of Spezzia, where they live in great retirement. In their choice of such retirement they are influenced by more than one good reason. In the first place, the death of the Vicomte de Caylus was an event likely to be productive of many unpleasant consequences to one who had deprived the French Government of so distinguished an officer. In the next, Dalrymple is a poor man, and his wife is no longer rich; so that Italy agrees with their means as well as with their tastes. Lastly, they love each other so well that they never weary of their solitude, nor care to barter away their blue Italian skies and solemn pine-woods for the glittering unrest of Society.

Fascinated by Dalrymple's description of his villa and the life he led in it, Hortense and I made up our minds, some few weeks after our marriage, to visit that part of Italy—perhaps, in case we were much pleased with it, to settle there, for at least a few years. So I prepared once more to leave my father's house; this time to let it, for I

knew that I should never live in it again.

It took some weeks to clear the old place out. The thing was necessary ; yet I felt as if it were a kind of sacrilege. To disturb the old dust upon the library-shelves and select such books as I cared to keep ; to sort and destroy all kinds of hoarded papers ; to ransack desks that had never been unlocked since the hands that last closed them were laid to rest for ever, constituted my share of the work. Hortense superintended the rest. As for the household goods, we resolved to keep nothing, save a few old family portraits and my father's plate, some of which had descended to us through two or three centuries.

While yet in this unsettled state, with the house all in confusion and the time appointed for our journey drawing nearer and nearer day by day, a strange thing happened.

At the end of the garden, encroaching partly upon a corner of it, and opening into the lane that bounded it on the other side of the hedge, stood the stable belonging to the house.

It had been put to no use since my father's time, and was now so thoroughly out of repair that I resolved to have it pulled down and rebuilt before letting it to strangers. In the meantime, I went down there one morning with a workman before the work of demolition was begun.

We had some difficulty to get in, for the lock and hinges were rusted, and the floor within was choked with fallen rubbish. At length we forced an entrance. I thought I had never seen a more dreary interior. My father's old chaise was yet standing there, with both wheels off. The mouldy harness was dropping to pieces on the walls. The beams were festooned with cobwebs. The very ladder leading to the loft above was so rotten that I scarcely dared trust to it for a footing.

Having trusted to it, however, I found myself in a still more ruinous and dreary hole. The posts supporting the roof were insecure; the tiles were all displaced overhead; and the rafters showed black and bare against the sky in many places. In

one corner lay a heap of mouldy straw, and at the farther end, seen dimly through the darkness, a pile of old lumber, and—by heaven ! the pagoda-shaped canopy of many colours, and the little Chevalier's Conjuring Table !

I could scarcely believe my eyes. My poor Hortense ! Here, at last, were some relics of her father ; but found in how strange a place, and by how strange a chance !

I had them dragged out into the light, all mildewed and cobwebbed as they were ; whereupon an army of spiders rushed out in every direction, a bat rose up, shrieking, and whirled in blind circles overhead. In a corner of the pagoda we found an empty bird's-nest. The table was small, and could be got out without much difficulty ; so I helped the workman to carry it down the ladder, and sending it on before me to the house, sauntered back through the glancing shadows of the acacia-leaves, musing upon the way in which these long-forgotten things had been brought to light, and wondering

how they came to be stored away in my own stable.

“Do you know anything about it, Collins?” I said, coming up suddenly behind him in the hall.

“About what, sir?” asked that respectable servant, looking round with some perplexity, as if in search of the nominative.

I pointed to the table, now being carried into the dismantled dining-room.

Collins smiled—he had a remarkably civil, apologetic way of smiling behind his hand, as if it were a yawn or a liberty.

“Oh, sir,” said he, “don’t you remember? To be sure, you were quite a young gentleman at that time—but——”

“But what?” I interrupted, impatiently.

“Why, sir, that table once belonged to a poor little conjuring chap who called himself Almond Pudding, and died”

I checked him with a gesture.

“I know all that,” I said, hastily. “I remember it perfectly; but how came the things into my stable?”

“Your respected father and my honoured master, sir, had them conveyed there when the Red Lion was sold off,” said Collins, with a sidelong glance at the dining-room door. “He was of opinion, sir,* that they might some day identify the poor man to his relatives, in case of inquiry.”

I heard the sound of a suppressed sob, and, brushing past him without another word, went in and closed the door.

“My own Hortense!” I said, taking her into my arms. “My wife!”

Pale and tearful, she lifted her face from my shoulder, and pointed to the table.

“I know what it is,” she faltered. “You need not tell me. My heart tells me!”

I led her to a chair, and explained how and where it had been found. I even told her of the little empty nest from which the young birds had long since flown away. In this tiny incident there was something pathetic that soothed her; so, presently, when she left off weeping, we examined the table together.

It was a quaint, fragile, rickety thing,

with slender twisted legs of black wood, and a cloth-covered top that had once been green, but now retained no vestige of its original colour. This cloth top was covered with slender slits of various shapes and sizes, round, square, sexagonal, and so forth, which, being pressed with the finger, fell inwards and disclosed little hiding-places sunk in the well of the table; but which, as soon as the pressure was removed, flew up again by means of concealed springs, and closed as neatly as before.

“This is strange,” said Hortense, peering into one of the recesses. “I have found something in the table! Look—it is a watch!”

I snatched it from her, and carried it to the window. Blackened and discoloured as it was, I recognised it instantly.

It was my own watch—my own watch of which I was so boyishly vain years and years ago, and which I had lost so unaccountably on the night of the Chevalier’s performance! There were my initials engraved on the back, amid a forest of

flourishes, and there on the dial was that identical little Cupid with the cornucopia of flowers, which I once thought such a miracle of workmanship! Alas! what a mighty march old Time had stolen upon me, while that little watch was standing still!

“Oh, heaven!—oh, husband!”

Startled from my reverie more by the tone than the words, I turned and saw Hortense with a packet of papers in her hand—old, yellow, dusty papers, tied together with a piece of black ribbon.

“I found them there—there!” she faltered, pointing to a drawer in the table which I now saw for the first time. “I chanced to press that little knob, and the drawer flew out. Oh, my dear father!—see, Basil, here are his patents of nobility—here is the certificate of my birth—here are the title-deeds of the manor of Sainte Aulaire! This alone was wanted to complete our happiness!”

“We will keep the table, Hortense, all our lives!” I exclaimed, when the first agitation was past.

“As sacredly,” replied she, “as it kept this precious secret !”

* * * * *

My task is done. Here on my desk lies the piled-up manuscript which has been my companion through so many pleasant hours. Those hours are over now. I may lay down my pen, and put aside the whispering vine-leaves from my casement, and lean out into the sweet Italian afternoon, as idly as though I were to the climate and the manner born.

The world to-day is only half awake. The little white town, crouched down by the “beached margent” of the bay, winks with its glittering windows and dozes in the sunshine. The very cicalas are silent. The fishermen’s barques, with their wing-like sails all folded to rest, rock lazily at anchor, like sea-birds asleep. The cork-trees nod languidly to each other; and not even yonder far-away marble peaks are more motionless than that cloud which hangs like a white banner in the sky. Hush ! I can almost believe that I hear the drowsy washing of the

tide against the ruined tower on the beach.

And this is the bay of Spezzia—the lovely, treacherous bay of Spezzia, where our English Shelley lost his gentle life! How blue those cruel waters are to-day! Bluer, by heaven! than the sky, with scarce a ripple setting to the shore.

We are very happy in our remote Italian home. It stands high upon a hill-side, and looks down over a slope of silvery olives to the sea. Vineyard and orange grove, white town, blue bay, and amber sands lie mapped out beneath our feet. Not a felucca “to Spezzia bound from Cape Circella” can sail past without our observation.

“Not a sun can die, nor yet be born, unseen
By dwellers at my villa.”

Nay, from this very window, one might almost pitch an orange into the empty vettura standing in the courtyard of the Croce di Malta!

Then we have a garden—a wild, uncultured place, where figs and lemons, olives “blackening sullen ripe,” and prickly aloes

flourish in rank profusion, side by side ; and a loggia, where we sit at twilight drinking our Chianti wine and listening to the nightingales ; and a study looking out on the bay through a trellis of vine-leaves, where we read and write together, surrounded by our books. Here also, just opposite my desk, hangs Müller's copy of that portrait of the Marquise de Sainte Aulaire, which I once gave to Hortense, and which is now my own again. How often I pause upon the unturned page, how often lay my pen aside, to look from the painting to the dear, living face beneath it ! For there she sits, day after day, my wife ! my poet ! with the side-light falling on her hair, and the warm sea-breezes stirring the soft folds of her dress. Sometimes she lifts her eyes—those wondrous eyes, luminous from within with “ the light of the rising soul,”—and then we talk awhile of our work, or of our love, believing ever that

“ Our work shall still be better for our love,
And still our love be sweeter for our work.”

Perhaps the original of that same painting in the study may yet be ours some day, with the old château in which it hangs, and all the broad lands belonging thereunto. Our claim has been put forward some time now, and our lawyers are confident of success. Shall we be happier, if that success is ours? Can rank add one grace, or wealth one pleasure, to a life which is already so perfect? I think not, and there are moments when I almost wish that we may never have it in our power to test the question.

But stay! the hours fly past. The sun is low, and the tender Italian twilight will soon close in. Then, when the moon rises, we shall sail out upon the bay in our own tiny felucca; or perhaps go down through the town to that white villa gleaming out above the dark tops of yonder cypresses, and spend some pleasant hours with Dalrymple and his wife. They, too, are very happy; but their happiness is of an older date than ours, and tends to other ends. They have bought lands in the neighbourhood, which they cultivate; and they have children whom

they adore. To educate these little ones for the wide world lying beyond that blue bay and the far-off mountains, is the one joy, the one care of their lives. Truly has it been said that

“ A happy family
Is but an earlier heaven.”

THE END.



MESSRS. HURST AND BLACKETT'S

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